New Testament
Toaru Majutsu no Index 8

Gremlin controls the entire world from the shadows. That organization that combines science and magic has caused many different threats: the terrorist attack in Hawaii, the experiment in Baggage City, and the theft of an immortal existence sleeping in Academy City. All of it had a reason.

Gungnir.

Magic God Othinus's ultimate objective is the production of that holy lance. Ollerus, the man who missed out on becoming a magic god, has disguised himself as Lightning God Thor, infiltrated Gremlin's base of Sargasso, and begun investigating.

The countdown to the destruction of the world draws near.

Meanwhile, Kamijou Touma, a poor student in Academy City, wakes up one morning to find Leivinia (a young girl) and Lessar (an erotic girl) under the same blanket as him.

Yeah, that's how it is! This is what happens to Kamijou-san even as the world falls into a crisis!

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新約 とある魔術の禁書目録(インデックス)⑧

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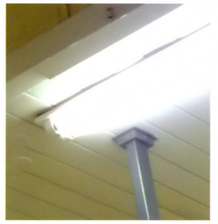

Kamachi Kazuma

Lights! Light bulbs became fluorescent lights, fluorescent lights became LED lights, and now they're talking about blue lights. What should decorate the scenery of "slightly advanced" entertainment?

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The Zashiki Warashi of Intellectual Village 1~3
A Simple Survey
A Simple Monitoring
The Circumstances Leading to Waltraute's Marriage

Illustrator: Haimura Kiyotaka

I am slowly drawing in the back country of Hiroshima.

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インデックス

8

鎌池和馬

イラスト／はいむらきよたか

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“Dammit… I haven’t caught a single fish. I want a nice healthy one.”

Gremlin member: Fertility goddess

Freyja

Designed by **H**irokazu **W**atanabe(2725 Inc.)

"The production of the spear is in its final stages. Have her finish the work with the skills of a Dvergr."
Gremlin leader: Magic god
Othinus
"Good, good, good. The temporary switchover from magic to science went well."
Gremlin member: Dvergr
Marian Slingeneyer
"Understood."
Gremlin member: Einherjar
Bersi

"Please. Lend me your power."
Level 0 student of Academy City
Kamijou Touma
"Leave it to me."
Nun who has memorized 103,000 grimoires
Index
"Leave it to me."
Academy City's #3 Level 5 Railgun
Misaka Mikoto

TOARU MAJUTSU NO INDEX NEW TESTAMENT

新約

とある魔術の禁書目録

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KAMACHI KAZUMA
鎌池和馬
イラスト・はいむらきよたか
HAIMURA KIYOTAKA
デザイン・渡邊宏一（2725 Inc.）

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PROLOGUE

Return of the God of Magic.

None_Signal_Island.

They were not recorded on any map or sea chart.

They were not treated as land under international law and they were not indexed for determining national territory or exclusive economic zones.

However, all local fishermen who knew those areas of the ocean knew of these “islands” and would never approach them.

They were known as a Sargasso, a ship graveyard.

But when magicians used that term, it did not refer to the area around the Gulf of Mexico. It referred to the mountain of sea wreckage that naturally gathered in areas of sea which met certain conditions: several currents striking each other, flotsam and driftwood gathering together like in the drain of a sink, and a reef or something else that caught at and allowed that flotsam to accumulate.

The remains of many different ships would gather there: fishing boats, transport ships, passenger ships, one-man kayaks, and military ships. Those corpses had lost the ability to sail on their own but were not so badly damaged that they completely sank to the ocean floor. They would be swept more than 100 kilometers over the ocean, gather in this one spot, and pile up into a mountain.

This created something like a giant ant lion trap that consumed that rotting wood and rusting steel.

Countless fragments and remnants would gather as more and more ships ran aground on the shallow reef. Eventually, the ground underfoot would be perfectly stable. It would become a true “island”.

Were there dozens of them or hundreds of them around the world?

No one had ever counted.

However, they continued to be feared as legends by the local fishermen.

And she had returned to one of those Sargassos.

“How are the preparations?”

She was Othinus.

The field of magic was kept hidden from the society at large and the concept of a Magic God had not been proven to exist even in that field, but she had taken a step into that territory.

Her external appearance was that of a girl of about fourteen. She had long, wavy hair and a glittering green eye. The other eye was covered by an eyepatch made of black leather. And it was not just that eye that was bound by leather. Her black outfit was wrapped tightly around her entire body and traces of a witch-like design could be seen here and there. For example, the cape and hat.

“We’ve gathered everything we need,” replied a magician named Marian Slingeneyer.

She was a Dvergr. In Norse mythology, those were the beings who created the weapons of the gods with techniques surpassing those of the gods themselves. In recent years, a theory had been created saying they were a small group of people rather than a fictional race. Marian was the legitimate successor to that group.

The many half-broken ships were sitting diagonally or toppled on their side, and objects similar to stainless steel ladders bridged the gap between them. The two of them safely crossed one of those alloy bridges illuminated by industrial lights.

“We used the massive volcanic energy at Hawaii as a reactor core, we carried out the holistic esper thought experiment at Baggage City, and…well, we failed to acquire Fräulein Kreutune at Academy City, but we filled that gap by acquiring a substitute. We can start at any time.”

“How is Bersi doing?”

“Well enough. He should be performing the final test on the parallel processor now.”

Gremlin had chosen Sargasso as their base for a few different reasons.

It was a good magical site due to the ley lines, it allowed them to remain hidden from the Anglican Church, Ollerus, and any others who might interfere, and it was simply an easy location to construct a fortress.

And there was one more reason.

Not only did it allow them to accomplish their goals from a magical perspective, but it also allowed them to borrow the power of science.

Their large goal required the installation and use of a large-scale and high-speed parallel processor.

Marian shrugged lightly.

“There’s nothing but junk piled up around here, but with fishfinders and marine radars, any proper ship is going to have a computer of some sort on board. All he’s doing is hooking together all of those and modifying them a bit to work in parallel, but it will apparently make a small supercomputer.”

Sargasso was made up of the ruins of ships that could no longer sail, but some of them had been swept away while their engine still worked. Using those engines as generators gave them a power source.

“As long as it helps create the lance, anything is fine,” said Othinus as if spitting out the words. “Will Bersi also handle this…whatever this thing in the cooler is. Academy City’s #2? Anyway, will he handle Fräulein Kreutune’s substitute?”

“No one but him can. After all, the point of that parallel processor is to send the proper signals in to make the substitute spit out Dark Matter in the form we want.”

The “#2” that Gremlin had taken from Academy City was more accurately “that which was once called Academy City’s #2”. A few of the organs from when he was a flesh-and-blood human had been preserved, but the Level 5 esper (?) known as Dark Matter had already freed himself from the constraints of a flesh-and-blood body. To put it simply, what they had at Sargasso was similar to the dregs or empty husk of the #2.

However, Gremlin’s goal was not to capture the #2 Level 5. It did not matter if this was just the dregs or the empty husk as long as they could draw out the power they needed for their goal.

Bersi, the magician who had once been known as Kihara Kagun, had been literally working day and night as he prepared the parallel processor needed for the Dark Matter. There was no inconsistency in his movements. He had been working for dozens of hours at an even pace like the second hand of a clock or a conveyer belt.

And there was a good reason for this.

He had truly died once and had been brought back by Magic God Othinus as an Einherjar.

“…”

Othinus silently looked upwards.

A giant transport ship had broken in half at the middle and that break rose up like a cliff. It had broken due to the welding points corroding and coming apart with age and exposure to the sea breeze. On the deck over ten meters up sat a boy with long blond hair.

The magic god called his name.

“Thor.”

“Yeah?”

“Once the lance enters the actual production phase, we will be unable to move. You know what you must do, right? Destroy everyone who gets near.”

“Got it, got it. Either way, it doesn’t look like there’s much for me to do here. How much of Gremlin’s resources are you planning to use to intercept any attackers? Can I use Mjölnir?”

“She will be used to support Marian.”

“I see.” The Lightning God Thor let out a light sigh. “In that case, *I feel sorry for our enemies*.”

“Do not head out as the Lightning God. Start as the Almighty Thor from the beginning. You can use anyone and anything you want outside of Marian, Mjölnir, and Bersi. I will even lend you the goddess Freyja and the giant Mökkurkalfe. At any rate, if anyone tries to interfere, give them a death at sea.”

“Will do,” casually replied the lightning god Thor as his legs dangled from the edge of the transport ship. And then, “But will anyone really attack with such interesting timing?”

“They will,” replied Magic God Othinus immediately but with no real emotion. “But not because the Anglican Church or the Roman Catholic Church are effective systems and not because Ollerus and his group are powerful. …It is because of my infinite possibilities as a magic god. My odds of success and failure are always half and half. The more work I accumulate towards success, the more a card leading to failure will grow somewhere in the world. It is like a shadow that follows my every move.”

“That isn’t good. Does that mean the enemy heading this way is you yourself?”

“Yes, in a way. I am telling you to knock back the misfortune that I call in. Do not think you can manage this with any normal amount of effort. This is on a level high enough to bind a magic god.”

Having said that, she motioned for Marian to follow her and then headed toward one end of Sargasso. She was likely headed toward the passenger ship that Gremlin used as a living space. It even had an undamaged indoor pool. That would be the ideal place to create the lance.

The Lightning God Thor lay down on his back.

He stared blankly up into the sky and thought to himself.

(Now then. Is it about time for me to cause some real damage?)

Anyone who looked at that long blond-haired boy would have said he was the Lightning God Thor. However, he was actually Ollerus, the man who should have become a magic god. He had used a high level disguise to change his looks and infiltrate Gremlin.

His objective was simple: stop Gremlin from creating Gungnir.

Magic God Othinus had obtained frightening power, but that power was too powerful. She could not fully control it herself. Having infinite possibilities sounded good, but it meant she had all positive possibilities and all negative possibilities. In this state, it was impossible to predict whether she would win or lose a game of rock-paper-scissors with a child.

No matter what she did, the odds of success and failure were always half and half.

To solve that dilemma, she had to twist those even odds to one extreme. To do that, she needed a single lance:

Gungnir.

Once Othinus obtained that, the world would literally come to an end. There would be no way of reversing the situation. A single human will would bring about a world where the infinite reaches of history would be eternally under a tyrannical rule.

However…

Even Ollerus would have a hard time defeating Magic God Othinus in a direct fight. And if Ollerus could not do it, it would be reckless to leave it to anyone else. That meant he had to wait. He had to wait until that true magic god had her hands full with the construction of the lance.

(For now, I'll check on the location.)

Ollerus looked up into the sky while lying on his back.

On the way here, he had been inside the hold of a cargo ship, so he had not been able to check on the position of the stars or anything else. For that reason, he had infiltrated his enemy's base while not knowing where it was. He had ways of gathering information while speaking with the other members, but he would stand out too much if he alone began asking questions like a tourist.

(*I need to know where this Sargasso is*. Once I know that, I can draw in the Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church, or another major force that wishes to defeat Gremlin. I doubt that will be enough to defeat every last member of Gremlin, though. They're all too skilled in their own individual ways.)

He stared up at that dead-looking sky that did not contain a single sea bird.

(Once her hands are full with this important work and an obvious enemy has arrived, even Othinus will be distracted. An opportunity for me to stab from the side will come. It will all come down to an instant. This will truly influence the flow of history from here on.)

CHAPTER 1

Preparations in the Background of Peace.

A_Terrestial_Globe.

Part 1

Let us go over a certain fact one more time.

Kamijou Touma was surrounded by misfortune.

When he properly finished his homework printout, the mischievous wind would blow it away. When he got on an elevator, it would trap him at one of the highest floors for no reason. When his stomach started hurting, no nearby convenience store would have a bathroom. When he walked five minutes down the road, he would run smack into a girl needing help. And of course, he would be chased around by magicians surrounded by a deadly aura and espers deeply dyed in the colors of bizarre science.

There was a baseless urban legend saying a human's luck evened out over their lifetime. Those who met with misfortune were simply "building up" their luck and they would have so much good fortune later that it would weigh them down. However, Kamijou did not believe in that. For those with true misfortune, not even that evening out process would work properly. There was a place that god would tilt his head and wonder "Ahh, ahh. Free will is great and all, but why did you have to get yourself stuck down there?" Those with true misfortune were stuck in that place from the moment they were born and they would not leave until the day they died. That was what Kamijou believed.

And thanks to this, Kamijou Touma was absurdly good at adlibbing.

He was used to having absolutely nothing go according to plan, so the only way to reach the success before his eyes was to make his way there by adlibbing. Several times in the past…no, about a dozen times in the past…no, no, several dozen times in the past, he had made his way through unthinkable deadly battles like that. No battle had ever followed his expectations from beginning to end. Whenever he was perfectly surrounded, he would destroy it all at the root by using an unexpected method that would only work in that specific instance.

Now.

Keep all of that in mind.

It was possible a survivor of so many battles would find the current issue to be no big deal. It was possible he could clench his right fist as usual, maintain his warm humanity in an extreme situation that would make any normal person fall to their knees in tears, face an ultimate difficult problem head on with his shoulder cutting through the air, fight until his body was bruised and beaten to protect the kind of smile found anywhere, and protect everything as if it had been nothing.

And…

The stopped second hand of the clock began to move once more.

♦

Kamijou Touma awoke in the bathroom's bathtub he used in place of a bed.

For some reason, two girls had climbed into the blanket on either side of him and fallen asleep.

"……Okay. Stay calm."

As an unpleasant sweat flowed from his entire body and he trembled from the top of his head to the tips of his toes, Kamijou, that veteran of countless deadly battles(?), did not let out a shout.

He understood.

He understood all too well.

If he gave a common reaction like that, these mystery girls with their sleeping faces looking like the symbols of peace would immediately jump up and "Kyahh! What are you doing!?" *Crash!! Wham!!* And then his roommate, the white nun named Index, would come running when she heard the commotion. She would charge in and "What are you doing, Touma!?" *Chomp, chomp, crunch!!*

It might be a bit hard to understand with all the sound effects, but a more detailed description would sound like something from a depressing snuff film. There was a good reason to keep it mild. It was possible the mincemeat-like remains would be eaten by the calico cat named Sphinx.

(No. Please no!! If you represent my remaining life with a thick candle, this kind of terribly pathetic mission is sure to wear down over half of the candle!! And I get the feeling the accumulated damage from this sort of thing is more than I've taken while seriously fighting magicians!!)

Kamijou's mind was in such chaos that his speech grew oddly effeminate.

However, looking away from a harsh truth would not end the danger.

There was something he had to do if he wished to survive.

"…"

He decided to begin by determining who these girls were.

He could not decide if it was a small piece of fortune or if it only made the situation worse, but he recognized the girls curled up and sleeping on either side of him.

The first was Leivinia Birdway.

She had slightly fluffy blond hair and white skin. She looked as if every pore and drop of blood was special made. It was as if she had been designed according to the golden ratio. If she had been introduced as some legitimate noble girl, he would have believed it. However, she was actually the boss of the Dawn-Colored Sunlight, the largest magic cabal in the great magic nation of England. She could grab a magician's hair as if pulling a large radish from the ground and swing them around, and she could make her wand sparkle and cause a highway junction to come crashing down.

The second was Lessar.

She was an imp-like girl whose waist-length black hair was braided at the end. She was an official member of a group called New Light which had even fewer ties of obligation than a magic cabal. She had grinned while taking part in a great commotion concerning the usurpation of the British crown, and she had enough skill to make her way unassisted throughout Russia while it was the main battlefield of World War III.

To put it simply, if these girls who were cutely breathing in their sleep woke up, their "Kyah! Pervert!" could easily lead to someone no longer being recognizable as human.

(For one thing, it isn't normal for Birdway and Lessar to be together. Are the outlaw members of the already secret magic side joining forces!? I can think of them as special versions of the mafia or gangs. I don't know why they're in Japan, in Academy City, and in my bathroom, but it can't be good news! I bet they'll grab the nape of my neck and drag me overseas!)

These questions would never be answered if he was smashed to a pulp. Kamijou Touma's top priority was finding a way to ensure his own safety. Everything else had to come later.

(I need to tread carefully here.)

War involved more than just firing missiles and shells at each other. Accurately detecting the threat, learning what enemy had to be defeated, and determining the conditions for victory were all part of the intelligence gathering stage of war.

And so…

Kamijou Touma gently grabbed the thin blanket covering him (and the two girls). He lifted the blanket bit by bit while paying very close attention to make sure his actions did not wake up the girls.

Make no mistake. Kamijou Touma was not a complete pervert who wanted to check on the pajamas of these defenseless sleeping girls or wanted to experience the aroma of the pearl-like drops of sweat that had appeared on their skin.

What mattered was whether those two girls held anything in their hands.

In other words, were they armed?

In general, it could seem like magicians could do anything, but the scale of their destructive power changed greatly between being empty handed and carrying plenty of spiritual items. To properly understand the threat and properly put together a means of escape, Kamijou wanted to know whether they held any deadly weapons.

Fortunately, he could not see any unrefined swords or any wands that looked like they would curse anyone who picked them up.

Incidentally, Birdway was wearing a chic blouse, a miniskirt, and thick black stockings (meaning her panties were very nearly visible) and Lessar was wearing an outfit similar to a blue and white lacrosse uniform with bike shorts (meaning he could likely see her panties if he stood up). It was possible they were hiding a weapon behind their back or in their skirt, but Kamijou did not even consider carelessly checking on that.

The instant he stuck his hand around their neck and down their back, he was sure it would end with “Kyah! Pervert!” *Crack, crack, crunch!*

To repeat, Kamijou Touma was surrounded by misfortune.

He had to act based on the assumption that anything and everything would happen at the worst possible time to invite misunderstandings.

(Okay, okay! They either don’t have any fearsome spiritual items or they have to take some time to pull them out. I won’t search any further than this. Anyway, anyway. I don’t have a perfect grasp of the situation, but I need to get out of this blanket and leave the bathtub before they wake up. That’s the only way to escape this threat!!)

The skill needed for a battlefield sniper was not the swift movements of a roach. It was the slow but certain movements of a slug.

Kamijou desperately suppressed his urge to shout at the top of his lungs and tackle his way through the bathroom door. With the delicacy of someone working with the colorful cords of a time bomb, he kept the blanket lifted up and slowly folded his extended legs like springs. By bending his knees, he could pull himself out of the warm tunnel created between the bottom of the bathtub and the blanket. Partway through, his big toe caught on a cloth thinner than the blanket. He prayed it was not Birdway or Lessar's miniskirt. That would ruin everything with a "Kyah! Pervert!"

Kamijou spent over 45 seconds moving from his lying position to a sitting position with his knees in front of his chest.

"P-pant… Pant, pant…"

Sweat dripped from his cheeks and down to his chin and he was breathing so heavily he could never explain it away if someone heard him. But this was what the situation demanded. Given how destructive these girls' magic was, it was no exaggeration to say this was similar to having stepped on a landmine that had yet to detonate because he had not lifted his foot up. It would have been more unusual had he remained calm in this situation.

(I need to place the bottom of my feet on the bottom of the bathtub. If I picture myself standing straight up and try to move accordingly, I'm sure to fail. What I need to do is lean my back up against the wall and lift myself up ever so slowly.)

He could do this.

Unless a large amount of pepper blew in from the ventilation fan and made him sneeze repeatedly, he could stand up without Birdway or Lessar noticing. Once he managed that, there was nothing left to be afraid of. He could step out of the bathtub, open the bathroom door, and say good morning to Index and the calico cat. It would all be over. He could safely overcome this!

But then…

"Garbage collection! Do you have any unwanted bicycles, unicycles, skateboards, or anything else!!!!!?"

Suddenly, a middle-aged male voice played through a speaker at high volume blasted in from outside.

Kamijou Touma distinctly felt a thin string in his mind snap.

And for a while after that, the boy saw nothing but a pure white expanse stretching to the horizon in all 360 degrees. This calm and gentle mental scenery severed the link between time and space. It may have been what would be seen in the very, very end by a hermit who spent all 100 years of his life training and meditating.

It was a perfect trance.

Reality gradually returned as if it were eating into the edges of his vision.

Kamijou's tear glands burst.

"Nn…"

"What is it? Keep it down…"

Kamijou clearly saw Birdway and Lessar's lips moving while they rubbed their eyes.

The gates of hell had opened!!

The boy's rational mind finally crumbled.

"No!! It's over. I'm done for!! This just isn't fair. What did I do to deserve thiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiissssssssssssss!?"

Kamijou's intense fear brought his voice into a falsetto as he returned to the panicked effeminate speech from before.

But the situation veered in a direction he had not expected.

With a look of annoyance, Birdway and Lessar pulled the blanket back over themselves. The reaction that could break through a concrete anti-explosive bunker never came.

In fact, they only gave the following casual comments.

"Mh… Quiet down. Do you have any idea what time it is? Mumble mumble…"

"I'm really jetlagged right now… Ugh, I'm tired. So very tired…"

Kamijou still could not believe it.

The sensitive heart of an injured boy would not recover so easily. Then again, if he used the secret technique of rubbing their heads or letting them use his lap as a pillow, their affection values would have exceeded the max value all at once.

Kamijou managed to escape that effeminate mode, but he was still trembling like a fawn.

“N-no, I get. I get it now!! You want me to say ‘Oh, is that all? You scared me. Eh heh heh.’ Then, when my guard is down and I turn my back, you send some amazing attack at the back of my head! That has to be it!! You shouldn’t target the medulla oblongata!!”

“…I don’t care what you think. Just let me sleep. I’ll kill you if you don’t.”

“U-uuhh…. You can touch my breasts as long as it’s over the clothes, so just let me sleep…”

Their reaction seemed more like that of someone with a hangover than sleep deprivation.

Feeling like a criminal when the guillotine blade continually refused to drop, Kamijou nervously checked on his situation.

(Am I safe? Am I in the clear?)

“No!! I can’t relax yet. I can’t!! For one thing, I don’t know how or why you two are here in my bathroom!! I won’t let my guard down until everything is clear!!”

“How…?”

As Lessar tried to steal the blanket from Birdway, she somehow answered Kamijou’s question in a low and truly annoyed voice.

“The wall…”

“There’s another concerning statement!! What does ‘the wall’ have to do with sneaking into here!? Are you saying you opened a giant hole in the wall and sealed it up afterwards!?”

Lessar seemed to have completely given up. She rolled herself up in the blanket like a cigar. Having lost the blanket, Birdway began jabbing her small knee into the cigar to reclaim the blanket.

(What in the world is going on?)

With the risk of instant death growing more distant, Kamijou was finally calm enough to arrive at the obvious question.

But…

He had forgotten something.

Namely, the risk of instant death due to a commotion in the bathroom did not only come from those two. Kamijou Touma had left a much closer and much greater danger unattended.

He heard it coming from outside the bathroom door.

“Touma? Are you up? I’m really hungry!”

“Hyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaan!!!???”

Kamijou’s entire body began twitching oddly.

This was bad. Very, very bad. Two girls were sleeping in the bathtub he used as a bed. There was only one blanket. How great a misunderstanding would this cause and how much destruction would it lead to? He did the calculations and it was obvious it would become a horrifically gory scene that would need to be censored.

(No!! The bathroom door is locked. I don’t need to panic!! …But wait. Birdway and Lessar snuck in here, right? Did these sleepy girls really lock the door before climbing into the blanket? Hypothetically speaking, what if they got in bed with the door unlocked?)

“Fhnn!!”

Like a scene from a Hollywood movie, Kamijou leaped over the edge of the bathtub, rolled along the bathroom floor, and slammed his foot into the center of the door as if trying to kick it with the bottom of his foot. This all-out defense came just as the doorknob began to turn.

Surprised by the loud noise of Kamijou’s foot slamming into the door, Index spoke up.

“Hyah!? Wh-what is it, Touma!?”

“Oh, sorry, sorry! Kamijou-san is in the middle of washing off his sweat from the night, so don’t come in right now.”

Just as he made up that excuse on the spot, Kamijou heard a creaking sound.

Kamijou felt an odd sensation in the bottom of his foot that was pressed against the door. Specifically, all resistance disappeared. A perfect rectangle in the wall one size bigger than the door collapsed outward.

Kamijou recalled Lessar’s sleepy words: the wall.

Index frantically escaped to the side while holding the calico cat. She just barely avoided the falling wall at the last second. While trembling on the floor in his rolling kick position, Kamijou exchanged a silent glance with Index who was curled up like a pill bug.

And finally, something happened.

Index's beautiful green eyes gained a beast-like ferocity.

"Touma, how did you leave two girls so exhausted this early in the morning? And you tried to take me out of the picture and use the confusion to make it look like an accident…"

"What…? Why is this misunderstanding so much more like something from an extreme soap opera!? But Kamijou Touma has overcome the battlefields of World War III, clashed with Gremlin, and survived fighting with the Freshmen and the rest of Academy City's dark side. I am not going to be taken out as easily as before. Today, I will get in at least one attack of my-…"

♦

Kamijou Touma would later describe the rest of the scene as being dyed in bright colors.

Part 2

New York, United States of America.

For better or for worse and wanted or not, a large part of the world was constantly influenced in some way by this leading city. It was both the symbol of and the center of the financial world. It was not as technologically advanced as Japan's Academy City, but Wall Street was still the heart of financial activity.

Of the five boroughs making up New York, Manhattan had the strongest image of money. But despite being the center of the financial world, it was a fairly special location. Because it was an island located between two large rivers, the buildings were tall and the population was dense. Transportation was almost completely dependent on countless bridges and underground tunnels. If all of the bridges and tunnels collapsed for some reason, the population density would mean the residents had a great risk of drying up. (Ironically, Hollywood had made several films involving Manhattan being isolated by a natural disaster, accident, or attack.)

Finances, theater, music, fashion… Manhattan was the prominent place for many different fields. However, there was one other building there with important meaning:

The UN Headquarters.

"What? Wouldn't it have been safer to hold it at the White House?"

It was the middle of the night.

While it was not at the level of Las Vegas, the streets were filled with an unnatural level of artificial lights. On one of those streets was a muscular man in his forties who looked like he could flex his muscles and rip apart the expensive suit he had been given by a group backing him. He was Roberto Katze. A plaza exited in front of the UN Headquarters building and Roberto was sitting on a shallow stone staircase there, eating a hot dog he had bought at a nearby stand. This did not seem like something the president of the United States would do, but the one responsible for security was not this unprecedented president. That responsibility lay with the skilled secret service members filling the area.

Standing tall next to Roberto while flipping through a memo pad was Roseline Krackhart. With her blond-hair, blue-eyes, and tight skirt suit, she looked like the perfect skilled secretary. However, the unfairness of the world could be seen in the fact that she was the one people thought looked out of place when she stood next to the president.

Incidentally, she worked as the president's aide, so it would have been stranger if she was *not* with him.

"The residence of the president has too much political pressure. Those that do not want America leading the solution to this issue would refuse to gather there. And more importantly, DC has too many journalists wishing to get rich quick. It will be easier to resolve this in secret if it is done in New York. How many times have I explained this to you now?"

"Isn't this place overflowing with journalists, too? Y'know, like the paparazzi who spend all year chasing after Hollywood actresses' asses nonstop."

"I get it, so stop pointing that disgusting pin-up magazine this way. I will sue you for sexual harassment. Anyway, it is an issue of quality. There is so much information here, that the truth is easily buried. The third-rate paparazzi of the entertainment world and the political reporters of the journalism world will grab different types of information from the same scene. And even if this does get out, much fewer people would believe the paparazzi."

"An emergency financial meeting of the G14, hm?"

"To prevent this gathering of heads of state from looking unnatural, we secretly intervened in the stock market."

"Did the folks on Wall Street scream when the stock prices fluctuated so wildly?"

"Everyone would be better off if they are taken down a peg or two. And we kept the losses at a low enough level to keep anyone from hanging themselves or jumping in front of a train at the end of the week."

In an incarnation of capitalism like the United States, those comments would have been enough to destroy their administration, but Roberto and Roseline showed no sign of caring. They knew that the value of information was always judged by the price tag of

credibility. The president and his aide would never talk about state secrets in a place like this. Anyone with that common knowledge would ignore those comments as a joke.

The human brain would selectively accept the information before one's eyes according to one's own tastes.

Having a secret strategy meeting in a hidden place and constantly looking over your shoulder with a serious expression would add a lot more credibility to what you said.

"Oh? Speak of the devil. The London market has arrived."

"If you noticed, then wipe that ketchup off your face, you bandit."

The president meaninglessly tried to make himself look good by licking it off of his thumb but ended up almost writhing around when he put a large amount of mustard in his mouth. The beautiful aide seriously contemplated stomping on him with her high heels. A black luxury car with a small flag on it silently came to a stop in front of them. The bodyguard that stepped out of the car first was not a well-built man in black. It was an Asian woman with long black hair tied in a ponytail and an extremely long Japanese sword at her waist.

When the bodyguard opened the door to the backseat, an elderly woman wearing a gorgeous dress stepped out with motions so smooth she did not seem to have a center of gravity.

This woman was Queen Regnant Elizard.

With the Curtana Second, sword of succession, she stood at the center of an entire nation.

She looked down at the bearded man sitting on the stairs while eating a hot dog and reading a pin-up magazine.

"What's this? An American welcome certainly has become casual. Even an old man hosting a weekend party at least stands up to welcome his guests."

"Do you happen to transform into an intensely beautiful girl during the full moon? If so, I'll think about it."

"Also, that looks good. Where was the stand you bought it at?"

"I'll tell you if you tell me where you hired that bodyguard girl. I want some beauty to add to my security team."

"Despite her appearance, Kanzaki Kaori is one of the world's fewer than twenty Saints. At the very least, that is not something you can buy at a street-side stand."

"I know. That's why I don't have one already. I could see her on the cover of this thing. My secret service is all so muscular."

When she finally remembered England's leader was fairly ridiculous too, Roseline Krackhart felt faint. The look of pity from the British bodyguard woman was the worst part.

However, the suffering for Roseline and her common sense was far from over.

Another group arrived, weaving through the crowded sidewalk in another direction. The short child who visually could have been a boy or a girl was the Russian Orthodox Church's Patriarch. And on either side of him was…Roseline was not sure what. On one side was a woman in a red nun's habit carrying a bucket-sized soft drink container. On the other side was a blond girl wearing chains and binding clothing and armed with saws, pliers, and other torture tools.

They spoke as they walked.

"When you come to America, you've gotta search around for some grotesque zombie games that haven't been released overseas, right, Sasha-chan? My faith normally lies solely in Japanimation, but you can't forget that their modern works are based in American culture! We can use our diplomatic rights to bring back the ones too gory to get past customs. Gahah gahah!!"

"A question: What if I pointed out that you should not be declaring faith in things such as that when you are a member of the Russian Orthodox Church? A supplementary comment: Aren't you afraid of falling victim to the inquisition for saying such things in front of the Patriarch who rules the church?"

"I-I wouldn't do that."

Anyone would have said the Patriarch was the most powerful one of the three, but the bodyguards on either side had such strong characters that he was completely buried.

(Ahh, does having common sense put you at a disadvantage and mean your entire life will be spent cleaning up after others?)

A distant look entered Roseline Krackhart's eyes.

Despite being in front of the representatives of several nations, Roberto Katze was openly reading a pin-up magazine with a special feature entitled "Top 100 Bunny Girls in Las Vegas". He spoke to his beautiful aide who was trying and failing to suppress her headache.

"Where are the others?"

"The French are already inside. The Roman Catholic Church's new pope should arrive soon along with the Italian Foreign Minister. The meeting should begin on time."

“A general offensive against Gremlin, hm?” muttered Roberto as he held the pin-up magazine in one hand as if waiting for a shaky washing machine to finish in a coin laundry. He then added, “Why does it have to be a time like this that we can’t reach that bastard Aleister at the top of Academy City.”

America claimed to be the world police, but they had been left out of the loop during World War III.

After receiving direct damage during the disturbance in Hawaii, they would take severe political damage if leadership of the attack on Gremlin was taken by Academy City.

But on the other hand…

Receiving no cooperation at all was disturbing in its own way.

Just because they could not contact the chairman of Academy City’s board of directors did not mean the city would not take action. Academy City could always do something on their own. If that happened, not only could America have the prize snatched from them, a failure in teamwork could lead to Academy City and America’s forces clashing instead of targeting Gremlin.

While Academy City was a single city rather than an entire nation, their advanced technology and massive amounts of next generation weapons and unmanned weapons allowed them to compete in a worldwide war. When making such careful planning, having such a major factor as a complete black box was not good for the heart.

(Well, this isn’t the first time they’ve insisted on secrecy. Suspecting every unknown factor just leads to restraining yourself for no good reason.)

“Okay. Let’s all go sit in those luxurious chairs and get this strategy meeting started.”

“In that case, close your vulgar magazine and do something about that protrusion in your pants. Even if this is unofficial, you can’t enter the conference room like that.”

“You could always take care of it for me. Heh heh.”

The instant after the president got carried away, Roseline mercilessly and unsympathetically stabbed her high heel into the center of his back. A sound like a giant drum being beat rang out. It had been such a fascinatingly sharp strike that the surrounding secret service carelessly watched it happen before coming to their senses.

“Did that wake you up?”

“Ofhh!? Cough cough!! …Th-that’s what you call a swordfish…”

“Enough about ocean romance.”

The sound of Roseline’s high heels tapping against the ground sounded like a beast threateningly gnashing its teeth. That eerie noise urged Roberto into the UN Headquarters along with the representatives of England and Russia.

“S-some illegals are taking part in the meeting, right?”

“They of course cannot enter this building, but they will be connected by a line that will leave no records. Our top priority is Gremlin and we will use whatever means are available to us. They will be taking part in real time from the other side of the globe.”

“I don’t know the details about magic or whatever, but what kind of people are they if they can stand on the same level as representatives of entire nations?”

♦

And in a certain student dorm in Japan’s Academy City, the boss of a magic cabal elegantly crossed her legs and fidgeted with a cell phone.

“People like me,” she muttered.

Part 3

In that early morning dorm room, Birdway ended a call on her cell phone and stuck it into her skirt pocket. She spoke with the expression of someone plotting a worldwide conspiracy.

“The preparations are complete.”

“Hm? Did you order a pizza?”

“I travelled to the other side of the globe. If I was hungry, I would order sushi or soba.”

A battered Kamijou gathered his hazy consciousness and listened to Birdway and Index’s heartwarming conversation.

If he was honest, he really did not care about the direction in which the world was headed.

He was more concerned about doing something about the hole cut out of the bathroom wall, but Kamijou was much too afraid of losing his deposit to go crying to the dorm supervisor. He began trying to escape from reality by wondering if there was some mysterious masked carpentry group that could repair the wall to as good as new.

The secret battles in the dark side of Academy City had all evidence and traces of destruction covered up, so he was convinced someone like that had to exist. The problem was he had not the slightest clue how to contact them.

To preserve usage of the bathroom in the meantime, he had covered the hole with a blue tarp. Having the bath and toilet exposed would have been too extreme a living environment.

At any rate, the distant look in Kamijou Touma's eyes may have been because of blood loss. After all, his head had been given a slight pomegranate-style decoration from the ferocious white nun's fangs.

With an energy-drained look on his face, he muttered something with his mouth opening and closing like a ventriloquist doll during a safety lecture.

"Ugh, just look at me. I let my guard down. I wonder if the day is coming when I will be forced into a serious fistfight with 120% beast mode Index or enter a drawn-out battle to the death with a dark shadowy gathering of misfortune given physical form…"

"Seeing you relatively fine after just wrapping a few bandages around your head makes me realize how many mysteries humans contain. And I thought I had seen everything there was to see about the human body, inner universe and all."

With that quick comment, Birdway, who was sitting at the kotatsu, turned a dissatisfied look toward the toast and salad in front of her. It seemed she wanted a breakfast of white rice and miso soup since she was in Japan.

Meanwhile, the white wild beast nun named Index split her toast in two, forced her salad (which had no dressing) in between the two pieces, and devoured the entire thing.

"Touma! I finished this in 15 seconds, so it doesn't count as a meal! I want bread, ham, and eggs too! More, more, more!!"

"Your method of eating it was too over the top!! Kamijou-san will not let you say this is the same as a hot sandwich! Index, that is nothing more than the 'it all mixes together in your stomach' strategy!!"

Lessar, who still looked sleepy, tore off a piece of her bread, dunked it in her hot milk, and ate it. It looked like she was trying to bring back the temptation of falling sleep by going with a night cap rather than a meal. Kamijou was a bit worried she would get cavities.

The TV that just so happened to be on was saying something about the G14 in New York. At this time in the morning, most channels only showed the news or variety shows for elementary school kids. Kamijou wished at least one station would show a gaudy comedian performance.

He also wished they could just get through with the headlines and the weather forecast in 30 seconds. In that way, he was no different from the average high schooler. He was the type who never checked the newspaper or TV schedule. Index on the other hand would always drool at "Today's Bento Corner" and copy it into her mind with her perfect memory. The truly annoying part was her complete inability to cook despite that perfect memory.

"I won't do it. Ham and eggs are banned!! Giving your meal a healthy balance is what matters most! The reason you don't feel full is because you didn't take your time eating it, Index!!"

"What!? In that case, I'll try to eat Sphinx's food! If you don't want Sphinx to be starving, make me ham and eggs!!"

"What kind of inhumane terrorist attack is this!?"

When Index picked the plate up from the floor, the calico cat stood up on its hind legs. Sharp claws silently appeared from its front paws. Grudges over food could be scary.

Birdway sipped on a milkshake made from putting eggs and sugar in milk (although she insisted it was a nonalcoholic eggnog cocktail) and jabbed her legs into other people's legs under the kotatsu. While quite relaxed, she spoke.

"For some reason, coming here makes me really start to not care about worldwide disturbances and an allied attack plan."

"Stop acting like this is your second home!! The trouble you bring with you is on a completely different level from other girls! …And did I hear some really dangerous terms mixed in there?"

"Yawn…"

After giving up on her food, Lessar rolled over on the floor and let out a yawn. If the kotatsu had not been there to guard her, her panties would have been on full display within her miniskirt.

She took the jerky she had given up on and held it out toward the cat which had had its food taken by a tyrant.

"We're here…to make sure the…um…trump card can be used at any time… We need to make the preparations…mumble…and keep Imagine Breaker ready to be used…"

"Hey!! Don't fall asleep in the kotatsu! You'll catch a cold!! And explain this to Kamijou-san! This sounds like you're going to get me involved, so at least explain it to me!!"

"Yawn… We played rock-paper-scissors in New Light… I won, so I got to go sightseeing in Asia… I won the plane ticket after beating down Floris who almost cried during the final match…"

“I wasn’t asking about the details of how you got here!! I want you to explain the general dangerous atmosphere hanging over all of this!!” shouted Kamijou.

However, Lessar seemed to have decided it was too much effort. She listlessly gave the cat bread crumbs and jerky. This effectively threw firewood onto the flames of Index’s jealousy.

“Here’s the thing,” cut in Birdway simply as she put butter and powdered sugar on her toast. “The groups that are finding Gremlin’s methods to be an eyesore are gathering together. There’s the Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, normal militaries like the American one and the Russian one, and…well, there’s a lot.”

“……That has nothing to do with me, right?”

“Why would I come to this cramped room for no reason? You fool. Don’t tell me you’re thinking of this as no different from your neighborhood childhood friend coming to wake you up.”

“What does any of this have to do with me!?”

“You’re the one that complained about this before!! Who do you think it was that said he would sulk if he wasn’t thrown into the most dangerous place in the world!? Do I need to retighten the screw in your head!?”

“Hold up. I think your mental translation of what I said is a bit-… Wait, wait! Birdway, that wand isn’t supposed to go in there!! I’ll listen, so calm down!!”

Like a scene from a Hollywood movie, Kamijou Touma leaped forward and somersaulted away as he desperately tried to put some distance between himself and Birdway. After escaping to the wall, he finally gained the calm needed to sort through the information.

“So…um…Hasn’t this escalated pretty quickly?”

“The alliance is still doing everything it can to search for Gremlin’s headquarters. Once it’s found, they will mount a unified attack against it. Gremlin is extremely powerful on the individual level, but it most likely does not have the organizational foundation needed to be called a world power. The fact that they are keeping their headquarters hidden is an admission that a large scale attack on it would be bad news for them.”

“This really has escalated quickly! …But if you plan to attack them head on, does that mean you can properly fight that magic god?”

Kamijou had once met Othinus in Eastern Europe’s Baggage City.

He had not stood a chance.

She had torn off his right wrist as easily as plucking a fruit from a tree and he had all too easily passed out from the blood loss and pain. If Ollerus and Fiamma of the Right had not arrived, Kamijou could not guess what would have happened.

If powers from around the world gathered, they might be able to defeat her.

Or could they?

Kamijou was not very confident. He could not imagine her kneeling down before anyone. And even if it was possible, that would mean a power rivaling Magic God Othinus would be clashing with her. How great a disaster would that cause?

However…

Birdway, a magic specialist, did not seem particularly concerned.

"Well, we're up against Gremlin which still holds plenty of secrets and Othinus who has taken a step into the territory of a magic god. And they are also in the process of putting together an extremely annoying spiritual item called Gungnir. Defeating them with any normal method would require a lot of work. That is why we want to keep an ace up our sleeve that will help us resolve this much more quickly."

"…Wait."

"Don't worry. We aren't going to throw you out in front of Othinus. You'd die instantly if we did. But there are crucial points in any plan. For example, when that spear is on the verge of being completed. We will send you in then and have you *break Gremlin's joint in a single blow*. Your role isn't to fight a lengthy battle from beginning to end. We're just going to use Imagine Breaker as a wedge we hammer in at a single opportune moment. You can survive that kind of fight, right?"

"Why does it sound like everyone's already decided I'm going to fight!?"

"Oh, so you won't fight?"

"Huh? Is this the legendary 'go right ahead, go right ahead' argument?"

After seeing the disasters in Hawaii and Baggage City, Kamijou was not about to leave Gremlin and Magic God Othinus to do as they wished. This felt much closer to home than a war in a distant country. Gremlin would go anywhere and invade anywhere that was necessary to accomplish their goal. Academy City may have been surrounded by tall walls, but it was no exception.

The next time he turned on the television, he might find that history had greatly changed and a new trauma had been carved into the world.

It was possible that news would be about Academy City being wiped off the map. They had such overwhelming power that Kamijou assumed they could do that and they had taken such aberrant actions that he doubted they would hesitate to do so.

Gremlin had an objective and it seemed all of their actions had been taken in order to construct Gungnir, but Kamijou did not know enough about magic to know the exact conditions for that. For him, it looked like they had been throwing darts at the world map and attacking the spot they hit.

"I guess…we have to do something…"

"If we had any other method, we would not use an amateur as the cornerstone of such a large scale attack plan."

"I try to keep in mind how powerless I really am. Just to be clear, I could never defeat the likes of Othinus. We're worlds apart. I solidly lost to the Lightning God Thor. And if Marian Slingeneyer had seriously drawn Dáinsleif, who knows how that would have turned out. …To be blunt, I've never had an honest win against them. Are you sure you're prepared to leave your life in the hands of someone like that?"

"But you can turn that around and point out that you survived against all of those monstrous opponents. Placing your objectives too high is never a good idea. All that matters is understanding that we still have a chance."

They were not expecting him to fight properly.

They were expecting nothing of Kamijou Touma. Their hopes were placed in Imagine Breaker.

In other words, this boy was being treated like the warhead of a precision guided bomb that would be dropped from an airplane. Professionals would guide him to the precise target and he would only need to swing his right hand at the optimal time and in the optimal place. Nothing more than that was expected of him and trying for anything more would be leaving the "optimal course".

Even if he could not defeat this powerful enemy head on, he had another way of doing serious damage.

Kamijou let out a deliberate breath.

"So where will you be taking me?"

"The alliance is searching all over the world for the exact location. It could be as far north as the North Pole or as far south as the South Pole. Assume anything is possible," replied Birdway as if making a decisive announcement. "We don't know if Gremlin even has an official name for the place. In fact, we're not even sure if there is any meaning in giving it a name. But for convenience's sake, I and the rest of the alliance are calling it this."

She paused for a moment.

It was as if speaking this name would decisively change the flow of events.

And Birdway spoke the name as if the word held some special meaning.

“Sargasso, the ship graveyard.”

Part 4

“Let’s go back over the events,” began United States President Roberto Katze in New York’s UN Headquarters.

He was in a conference room, but it was not the large scale room for over 100 representatives that was often seen on the news. That would have been too large for 14 heads of state to argue with each other.

This was a rectangular room given perfect soundproofing with a double glass partition. A long table cut down the center of the room and the heads of state of the anti-Gremlin alliance sat around it.

The room had no outside windows, so day and night meant nothing. The building did not have extreme differences in the number of people coming and going based on the time of day; it was always busy.

Now.

Kanzaki Kaori and Vasilisa, two of the bodyguards, were not inside the small conference room. While armed guards were effective for defensive firepower, they constantly held the risk of harming the other VIPs. Under the naïve assumption that the representatives would not attack each other because they all had the same objective, all bodyguards had been removed from the room with the exception of America’s secret service as America was the country responsible for security within the conference room.

However, Kanzaki and Vasilisa possessed exceptional power even among those known as magicians.

The glass met all soundproofing, bulletproofing, and explosives-proofing standards, but they could break through it with their bare hands and instantly move to act as a shield for their protection target. They could also send a curse at a hypothetical enemy inside the room without having to break the glass.

As Vasilisa watched the president through the glass, she muttered something in sync with his mouth movements.

“Okay, let’s see… Gremlin’s objective is the construction of a special spear. To accomplish this, they caused the incident in Hawaii, performed some kind of experiment in Baggage City, and infiltrated Academy City.”

“…Are you bored?” asked Kanzaki in annoyance.

Vasilisa shrugged.

“I can’t have fun with Sasha-chan here because too many people would start glaring at me.”

“A question: Do you mind if I split your skull open?” immediately added the Russian bodyguard wearing a binding outfit.

Vasilisa ignored the girl and knocked on the tempered glass. Naturally, not even a slight vibration reached the conference room on the other side.

“What do you think, Miss England?”

“I find it hard to believe this Magic God Othinus even exists, but this is no longer a situation I can judge with my common sense.”

Kanzaki gave an exhausted sigh.

She had fought an official member of Gremlin on a mobile fortress moving to Academy City. Her opponent had apparently been a girl, but her appearance had been that of a thick, black, drum-like cylinder. Gremlin was willing to rearrange the human body that far in pursuit of efficiency. Kanzaki did not know what future they hoped for, but if they gained control and that became normal, she doubted it would be a good future.

“Gremlin’s objective is bringing Magic God Othinus to her perfect state. To do that, they must construct Gungnir. In Hawaii they used the massive energy of a volcano as a reactor core, in Baggage City they proved their theory about the development of holistic espers to reach an area impossible to reach with simple magical theory, and in Academy City they were searching for the actual person to use. Some portions of their theory seem impossible to verify to me, but perhaps I should assume their techniques have exceeded my understanding.”

Kanzaki Kaori could not ignore an issue concerning the Norse spear of Gungnir.

When the Saint Brunhild Eiktobel had completed a prototype of that spear, Kanzaki had fought and defeated her.

“Well, I agree with you there, but the problem is that all of this information comes from the illegals,” said Vasilisa disinterestedly.

“You mean the Dawn-Colored Sunlight?”

“Not just them. The Saint Silvia and the half magic god Ollerus as well. Powerful people we had recently doubted even existed are showing up one after another. I hear one of them has successfully snuck into Gremlin, but how much can we trust them?”

Magic cabals were like the mafia and gangs of the magic world. The possibility of them joining forces with Gremlin to destroy Christianity’s control of the magic world was just about the worst possibility imaginable.

However…

“If the common knowledge of our world is enough here, I do not see why the Dawn-Colored Sunlight would betray us.”

“Why not?”

“A world with Gremlin in control would be riskier than one with Christianity in power.”

“Yes, modern Western magic is based on secret tricks of Christianity.”

“Gremlin specializes in Norse mythology. If they filled the world with that and eliminated the Christian materials as if overwriting the culture, that would be a fatal blow to the Dawn-Colored Sunlight. Based on what benefits them, we should be able to trust them for now. And even if we cannot trust them, we should be able to determine when they will betray us and take the initiative.”

“Perhaps,” agreed Vasilisa casually.

She was not simply agreeing with an opinion that put her at ease so she could gain a peace of mind she depended on. Nor was she simply being optimistic without giving it much thought. No matter what happened, she would ultimately bite into her target’s windpipe and finish them off. Kanzaki could sense that icy will in the core of Vasilisa’s relaxed body.

And Vasilisa herself was carefree.

Most likely, even if she stood on the brink of mankind’s utter destruction, she would enter that final battle while perfectly carefree.

“After travelling around the world gathering the materials they needed, Gremlin has holed up in their hidden headquarters. The time limit until the spear’s completion is unknown. And if that allows Othinus to wield the legendary power of a magic god, the world has no chance of winning. I want to finish this before the spear is completed.”

“The spy in Gremlin has to check the arrangement of the stars to determine the location of Sargasso, right?”

“I just hope everything comes together in time.”

Part 5

Now then.

No matter what resided in his right hand and no matter how many times he had almost died, Kamijou Touma was essentially a high school student. After eating breakfast, he had to prepare for school.

However…

“Hey, after breakfast, we’re heading to District 23. I’ve spoken with one of the twelve board members I was able to access. A supersonic passenger plane has been prepared for us, so we should arrive at Sargasso a few hours after it’s located no matter where in the world it might be. …You’re basically being treated like a ballistic missile.”

“I don’t think so!! Kamijou-san is a student, you know? My attendance is already in serious trouble! At least let me go to class until you need to call me in. I want to at least be there for the roll call this morning!!”

“I see.” Birdway folded her arms in a meaninglessly pompous manner. “You can do that if you like, but I need to make sure you can leave at any moment. I won’t be leaving your side. If you insist on going to class, you have to do so while I sit on your lap. Is that okay?”

“The class would never calm down! And I just know Aogami Pierce would get especially worked up!!”

Lessar had completely ignored her breakfast and slept for twenty minutes or so, but she finally woke up and blinked her eyes blearily.

She spoke to Index who was still complaining about being hungry (despite Kamijou having ultimately made her the ham and eggs).

“Huh? You’re a strict Anglican, so I thought for sure you’d be insisting an amateur high school student can’t be sent into a magic battle like this. An illegal like me has no problem with getting him involved in all sorts of things, though.”

“I already know that complaining about that won’t stop Touma,” immediately replied Index while giving a snort. “And in that case, I have an idea.”

“?”

Lessar tilted her head in puzzlement, but Index gave no further explanation as she held the calico cat.

After a much too uneven vote between those who wanted to go to school and those who did not, Kamijou’s actions were restricted considerably. After stubbornly changing into

his school uniform in the bathroom covered by the blue tarp, the boy was half-dragged outside by Birdway.

It was early morning.

They were walking down the same path students used on their way to school.

As those other uniform-wearing boys and girls made their way to school as usual, Kamijou Touma alone walked in a completely different direction along with three girls (who were all rather small). In both appearance and direction, he moved against the flow of the others who were moving out of his way because they were true Japanese who preferred to passively avoid conflict.

“This is painful… This may be fairly subdued, but it’s still really painful!! Due to the powers development, this city is relatively respectful of individual freedom, but I can tell I’m really, really standing out right now! Can girls born and raised in England not sense this tremendous awkwardness!?”

For some reason this caused Lessar to put her hands on her hips and puff out her chest.

“Hah hah hah! We are from the country that makes travelers eyes open wide in surprise when we treat them to homemade cooking! We are from the country where guidebook recommendations are for some reason filled with Chinese restaurants! Did you really think we would falter when faced with alienation on this level!?”

“Kh. I wish I had the confidence to tell six billion people it’s their sense of taste that’s wrong… And Lessar, you know how to cook? I didn’t know that!”

It seemed they had to take a direct bus to District 23 rather than a train.

But unlike the buses that travelled around the city areas, not many people used this bus. And that meant there were large gaps between buses.

Despite already gathering such unpleasant attention, they were forced to wait at the bus stop for a while.

“I never knew simply sitting on a bench waiting for a bus could squeeze at my chest so much!!”

Kamijou complained, but then Leivinia Birdway vigorously sat down on top of his lap.

“What are you doing!? Aren’t you going a bit far for a one-off gag!? Sit next to me! Next to me!!”

“Don’t joke. I am wearing a skirt. I would never sit on a bench chilled by this early morning November air. Try to respect my basic human rights, you fool.”

“I’m pretty sure nothing I said was wrong, so why am I being scolded so harshly!?”

“Yawn…”

“I would also like to ask why Lessar is sitting next to and snuggling up against me. What is going on, lovely lady from the support center!?”

“…My drowsiness is back. Jetlag is terrible…”

Birdway held Kamijou down from above and Lessar completely restricted the movements of his right arm. He felt soft sensations all over and a sweet smell filled the air, but a sudden electric current-like shock ran through Kamijou’s head from the right temple to the left.

“Touma.”

“…Please wait a moment, Index-san.”

“I never thought I would have to bare my fangs again before my anger had fully faded.”

“I didn’t expect this either! Please just wait! I request a compromise concerning your standard tsukkomi punishment of biting the back of my head! Let’s limit it to once a day. Let’s not go any further than tha-…gyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhh!?”

Part 6

On the way to school, Misaka Mikoto stood silently with one of her cheeks twitching.

That spiky-haired idiot was once more pulling off repeated miracles that could never happen in a normal life. Who was that imp-like girl snuggling up against him on that bench? Who was the dangerous blond girl sitting on his lap who he had been seriously fighting just the other day? And was having that silver-haired nun biting into the back of his head supposed to be a normal occurrence? So much information came pouring in at once that she could not settle any single issue in her heart. To put it a bit more colloquially, she was having difficulty deciding what she should get mad about first.

Normally, Mikoto might have used her control over massive amounts of magnetism to rip the entire bench up into the air and shout “Ventura, Ventura!!” while launching it high into the sky. However, she was different today.

She spoke in a low, quiet voice that was almost a groan.

“…I’m sick of this position.”

“Oh? Is that Misaka-san standing here all alone and trembling☆?”

Mikoto’s shoulders jumped at that sudden sugary voice.

She frantically turned around and found an unfamiliar woman in a showy suit. However, Mikoto put her guard up even further when she saw the star-like object twinkling in the woman’s eyes.

She was being controlled by the #5, Mental Out.

“What are you doing here, Shokuhou?”

“Nothing really. And does it really matter? But what are *you* doing here, Misaka-san? Does it have to do with the gentleman sitting on that bench? Sniff sniff. Sniff sniff sniff sniff…”

“Don’t smell me! Don’t smell me! What do you hope to learn from that!?”

“If you want to know what’s going on, why don’t you just go over and ask him?” said the woman in a whisper.

“Wha-!? Wha-wha-wha-wha-wha-wha-what!?”

Mikoto’s entire face explosively turned red. The woman in the showy suit who looked either like a career woman or a sexy teacher lightly clenched her fists and rubbed them together up near her mouth.

“Aren’t you curious? Aren’t you curious?”

“N-no, I’m not!! Not at all and not one bit!!”

Mikoto could not afford to show the slightest opening to this expert in controlling minds, so she denied it as much as she could.

However, the #5 Level 5 outdid her.

“Well, I am curious.”

“What!?”

“And so I think I’ll go check on this issue that Misaka-san is not at all and not one bit curious about. After all, if I smile at him with ‘her’ appearance ability, I should be able to win over most any guy.”

The woman in the showy suit struck a pose and pressed a sideways peace sign against her eye.

“And even if an adult woman isn’t in his strike zone…”

“If I bring in this much variation…”

“He’s sure to like at least one of them☆”

Another nine girls lined up next to the woman and struck the same pose. There was everything from a literary girl with braided hair to a sports girl with brown skin.

Mikoto was reminded of the skits put on by connecting puppets to one’s arms and legs with long horizontal rods so they would dance along with you.

The girls spoke with star-like objects glittering in their eyes.

“Fwa ha ha ha ha! If I use the same barrage ability as a fighting game with only girl characters, not even his denseness can save him!! I will be able to control everything, Misaka-saaaan!!”

“Stop that! If you destroy the male-female ratio any further, this will fall into complete chaos!! And don’t tell me you have some strange connection with him from the past!”

Mikoto would gain nothing by letting her cause any more trouble.

In fact, she had a distinct feeling that if she let those ten girls and women continue on, that idiot would miraculously win over all ten of them and somehow manage to drag Shokuhou Misaki herself out onto the stage as well.

And so…

In order to prevent unnecessary interference from the #5, Academy City’s #3 Level 5, Misaka Mikoto, thrust her hands forward, controlled a massive amount of magnetic power, and targeted the metallic portions of the bus stop bench.

She let out a shout from the bottom of her gut.

“Ventura, Venturaaaaa!!!!!”

Part 7

The nun named Agnese Sanctis was in the giant library connected to the UN Headquarters building.

During the night, the number of people inside fell drastically.

However, that silence seemed appropriate for a nun.

She was officially a member of the Anglican Church, but ever since World War III, she had been working to return to the Roman Catholic Church.

She had transferred from the Roman Catholic Church to the Anglican Church under special circumstances and her current work was one step in the process to return now that the friction between the two churches had lessened.

The work she had been left with was very simple.

“Nothing here. There’s no danger of any magic power or anything else having been hidden inside.”

“Ugh. They’ve gathered over 300 pages from newspapers alone today, haven’t they?”

“Yes, and that is why there is a risk of malicious magical symbols or circles slipping through.”

Working with Agnese was Lucia and Angelene. They were also nuns who had moved from the Roman Catholic Church to the Anglican Church and were now working to return.

The tall one with long blond hair was Lucia.

The stooped one with braided blond hair was Angelene.

“Honestly, if they’re really afraid of an attack from Gremlin, they should stop anyone from bringing published items in during the meeting.”

“Doing that on ‘our’ authority would cause other problems. UN headquarters is fundamentally neutral. If a single religion began selecting what published materials could be brought inside, it could lead to an international issue.”

“I-in other words, the normal people don’t understand the danger of the problem we’re dealing with.”

World War III had been a large-scale conflict in which science and magic had directly clashed.

Towards the end, cover-up efforts had not made it in time and a lot of people had seen magic. However, it seemed no one had incorporated magic into their proper studies, technology, or everyday lives. As far as the churches could tell, no one had even tried. All that had cropped up were small spiritual and eschatological groups.

“What do you think about this united attack on Gremlin?”

“I think it all hinges on whether they can locate Sargasso. It seems they are using a large-scale ceremonial ground to search out all the suspicious points around the world, but the real deciding factor is probably that spy who has slipped into Gremlin.”

“Th-that spy will send a signal from Sargasso and our search team will detect it, right?”

The conversation trailed off there and Agnese let out a sigh.

She spoke with the sharpness of driving in a wedge.

“How far we can trust this spy is an unknown factor.”

“True. I think you almost have to be suspicious when you hear that this person has a way of sneaking into Gremlin’s headquarters and has in fact already done so.”

“B-but it is true that it would be hard to find anyone else who can deceive a group as elusive as Gremlin, right? More importantly, this spy has no reason to betray us…”

“I’d say it’s more accurate to say that Gremlin has no reason to make a bluff like this right now.”

“So we have no choice but to trust this person because they want the same thing we do. Is that it?”

Up to this point, Gremlin had perfectly hidden themselves despite having a large-scale force including a magic god. Searching for them with normal means was unlikely to turn up any results.

They had no idea how this spy had infiltrated Gremlin, but sending the signal would have to be a great risk for him.

If Gremlin grew suspicious of him partway through, it would all be for naught.

And if Gremlin detected the signal after it had been sent, they would begin to search for the traitor. If he could not ensure his safety on his own until the attack began, there was no guarantee he would survive.

Just checking the records concerning Hawaii and Baggage City was enough to know Gremlin was a merciless organization.

Lucia stood tall and spoke.

“And even if we locate Sargasso without issue, that leaves the unified attack. That will mean both sides must wear each other down until this is resolved. Our opponents are thoroughly trained magicians and a true magic god. …I doubt this is an enemy we can defeat without sacrifices.”

“But keep in mind that Gremlin is currently hiding,” said Agnese. “In other words, they think it is to their benefit to remain hidden. They aren’t descending grandly into the middle of the battlefield like Fiamma did. At the very least, locating Sargasso will crush one of the advantages Gremlin assumes they will have.”

“I-I just hope this isn’t a case of poking at a bush and having a snake come out.”

Everyone there thought the same thing.

However…

It was also true that being afraid of a snake was no reason to leave the bush alone and allow the snakes to breed inside. If that would happen, someone needed to take the risk of sticking their hand into the bush, grabbing the snake, and exterminating it.

The problem was that someone had to push the branches aside, knowing they would be bitten.

Part 8

In that moment as Kamijou Touma stared into the distance, the image of a boy flying through the night sky with an alien friend in his bicycle basket appeared clearly in the back of his mind.

Here is why:

Before he knew what was happening, the bench shot to the side like a shell. Kamijou was still sitting politely on the bench, Birdway was still sitting right on top of his lap, Lessar was still nestling up against him, Index was biting onto him from behind, and the calico cat was digging into her white hood with his front claws. They all crashed into a nearby river.

But there was no great splash and they did not sink into the river.

With a few smaller splashes, the bench flew in low arcs and jumped back up whenever it touched the water’s surface. It was similar to a skipping stone. Not a single drop of water reached Kamijou Touma as he sat on the bench. The bench crossed to the opposite bank of the river, decelerated as its legs scraped across the asphalt and sent orange sparks trailing after it, and ultimately came to a stop.

Kamijou then shouted out at the unfairness of it all.

“What the hell was that!? Has Kamijou-san’s misfortune finally become completely indiscriminate!? And Index! Don’t support your entire body by biting into the back of my head! Are you trying to finally rip off my scalp today!?”

Birdway’s expression remained relatively unchanged as she let her crossed legs dangle down from Kamijou’s lap.

“Hey. Academy City’s technology is twenty or thirty years ahead of the rest of the world, right?”

“Is it normal for benches to fly through the air and skip across rivers in the future?”

It seemed the two girls had made a fundamental misunderstanding, but Kamijou did not have it in him to join the discussion.

A new enemy had appeared.

This new enemy descended from the heavens.

Two legs landed on the back of the bench as if driving stakes down into the ground. Misaka Mikoto bent over and peered upside down through the tunnel she had created by spreading her legs apart. And she glared at Kamijou Touma.

She asked a blunt question.

“Explain this.”

“That’s my line!!”

Between the Lines 1

Musicians had a difficult life.

Those who played instruments, conductors, lyric writers, and composers were all referred to as musicians and they all possessed a common dilemma.

All musicians loved music.

They could identify sounds more accurately than anyone else, they researched sound more than anyone else, and they could produce more wonderful sounds than anyone else.

As a result, they would use their ears more than a normal person, so it was not uncommon for them to go deaf.

Due to pursuing beautiful sounds more than anyone else in the world, they would wear out their ability to detect sounds.

However, this irony was not limited to musicians.

Artists would wear out their eyes and cooks would taste their food so much they would lose any balance to their nutrients and health. Baseball players would ruin their shoulders and soccer players their knees.

Anyone who continued down a single path far enough was destined to have their body worn down by that path.

Understanding that yet still being prepared to continue down that path may have been the very first condition for one who wished to master a certain path.

And in that case…

"…"

A man known as Kihara Kagun in Academy City and as Bersi in Gremlin was silently working on Sargasso, a pile of many ruined ships on the ocean.

It was November and a white haze was rising from the ocean surface as if visually representing the chill of the air. Sargasso was wrapped in that thin mist, but no white breaths could be seen leaving that man's mouth.

He was not breathing.

He did not show any signs of feeling this biting cold air or any sign of the normal reflexes and reactions of a living creature.

He was an Einherjar.

He was an emotionless object that carried out precise movements based on the magic power externally poured into him instead of the life force at the core of a living being.

He had joined Gremlin for a single purpose.

And in exchange for (in a way) perfectly achieving that purpose, Kihara Kagun had worn down all of his sensory organs and lost the spirit needed to receive those stimuli. Even though his heart was beating and his brain continued producing thoughts, he was essentially "something that was already dead".

Kihara Kagun worked with the uniform speed of a clock's hand and the precision of a loom.

His job was to find the computers from the radios, fishfinders, navigation control systems, and other devices installed on the dozens or even hundreds of ruined ships that had drifted to Sargasso. Once he found them, he would connect them with cables and make some programming adjustments so they could function as a parallel processor. This high-speed and large-scale processor was necessary to use the empty husk of the #2 which had been retrieved from Academy City.

This was the other side of Gremlin.

This man was the cornerstone of their science side technology.

He was completing the final preparations needed to construct the lance. Kihara Kagun had lost the mind he needed to think about what his actions meant, so he merely silently connected the cables to create the giant processor.

This would most likely swallow up something he had once wanted to protect, and yet he continued.

He spoke into the small radio in his hand.

“I’m done here. The refrigerated organs can be used at any time to remake the empty husk of the #2 into the machine to create the lance.”

CHAPTER 2

Miniature Garden Within the Investigation.

Area_No.23.

Part 1

There was a fair bit of conflict on the way, but as planned(?), Kamijou Touma arrived in Academy City District 23 by bus.

His party had started out with Index, Leivinia Birdway, Lessar, and the calico cat as members, but Misaka Mikoto had joined at some point.

“What happened to Japan’s compulsory education?” he asked her.

“Unlike you, my school trusts me. I don’t have any problems with attendance, so I can miss a few days and be fine.”

“Trust, hm? Yeah, I don’t have that…”

“Wait. Why are you staring off in the distance so much today? Are you tired???”

If Kamijou Touma wrote down a detailed time schedule, he had a feeling it would be in violation of some kind of labor law, but unfortunately for him, clenching his fist and punching people did not legally qualify as labor.

The terminal building for District 23’s international airport had a very open design that used a lot of glass to allow plenty of sunlight in. It was a weekday and Academy City was strict about who it let in and out, so it was not filled with sightseers. Nevertheless, it still had plenty of people coming and going.

One group was wearing the traditional outfit of some distant country. There was a businessman wearing a custom suit that was obviously not premade and probably cost as much as a domestic family car. The person with him was either a secretary or translator. The great number of people in work clothes was due to Academy City’s lack of any entrances by sea sending that traffic to the land and air routes instead.

“We made it this far, but what do we do now?”

“Nothing,” simply replied Birdway. “As I explained, we are waiting for further instructions right now. The supersonic passenger plane is completely chartered, so we don’t have to line up at the reception counter for some airline. We can also skip the metal detectors and X-ray scan. We head out to the runway through the crew exit and ride an electronic cart straight to that monstrous plane. We also have the highest rank for takeoff priority, so we don’t have to wait for other planes to take off.”

“I can’t believe that,” muttered Mikoto who had been half-listening. “Academy City is full of scientific information. There may have been takeoffs and landings that ignored the standard procedures during the confusion of World War III, but this kind of special treatment could be used to slip proprietary technology out of the city.”

“And there’s enough danger now to warrant that risk. This is on just as large a scale as that war, if not larger. This is no time to worry about the smaller issues.”

“Wow. That sounds bad,” cut in Lessar as if it had nothing to do with her. “But if we’re waiting for orders, that means this is essentially free time, right? Then I want to go to the shopping mall over there. There’s something I want to buy duty free while I have the chance.”

“What is it?” asked Index as she held the calico cat.

“Well,” replied Lessar immediately. “A showy swimsuit.”

……

For an instant, Kamijou Touma lost his ability to chain events together as if a stun grenade had gone off nearby.

Why?

It was November. What would she be doing that needed a swimsuit!?

As confusion fell over Kamijou, Mikoto silently grabbed the collar of his school uniform.

She shook him back and forth and asked him questions with all her strength.

“Hey!! What kind of space-time exists around you!? Do you have some special characteristic that distorts the rules of the world around you toward the color pink like some kind of black hole!?”

“This! Isn’t! My! Fault! I! Don’t! Know! What! To! Tell! You!!”

Kamijou gained the new experience of hearing the Doppler Effect on his own voice, but it was not something he could enjoy. His semicircular canals were on the verge of being completely destroyed and he did not want to vomit before even boarding the monster airplane.

“Listen. We may be fighting alongside the Anglican Church and the Roman Catholic Church for now, but we aren’t going to get along forever,” said Lessar as she shrugged. “Once we make our united attack and finish things with Gremlin, who will their next enemy be? They’ll naturally want to defeat the thorn in both their sides while working together. …And they will work fast to defeat that enemy while they still know where it is.”

“So that’s it,” spat out Birdway. She looked calm, so she had likely already anticipated that problem. “Yes. A southern resort on the other side of the world would be a good place to hide until the heat dies down.”

“Ah, that was my vacation plan! Please don’t come along! You’ll just make some odd mistake and bring them after both of us!!”

As the two girls argued, Kamijou’s party was dragged to the duty free shopping mall. It was obvious the word “swimsuit” would bring nothing good with such a dangerous group. (He was especially worried about a heavy tsukkomi coming in the form of biting or high voltage electricity.) However, he had no answer of his own as to how to kill time until someone contacted them.

In fact, a normal high school student had no way of knowing what was inside the service facilities of an international airport or where any of it would be.

The aforementioned shopping mall was a vast three-story building with the center opened up between all three floors. According to the posters hung up here and there, the building contained over one thousand stores. Kamijou had a feeling a glance at a map of the place would make him dizzy.

“I doubt there are even a thousand different kinds of stores in the world. How much internal competition is there in this place?”

While not listening to Kamijou’s comment, Birdway and Lessar stared at the guide map that had a touch screen to search for the store one wanted.

“This has the same layout as a prison’s cell block.”

“When you want to cover as much of the facility as possible with as few cameras as possible, you naturally end with something similar.”

Kamijou wondered if it was normal for their chats to have such dangerous words mixed in. He also thought they would stand out in a tropical resort right away no matter how proper a swimsuit they wore.

“So where do you want to go? Have you found a store that caught your interest?”

“50% Less Skin Covered.”

“That isn’t proper at all! You really aren’t trying to blend in, are you!?”

“You fool. We are going to an international resort where you’re free to have fun however you like. You try going there wearing a mass of cloth that some hick would wear. You would stand out more than the shining sun.”

“N-no. Kamijou-san doesn’t have it in him to oppose the entire idea of swimsuits in November even if it is a turn of events on the level of having the whatever-they’re-called lines on your palm turn at a right angle. But I would at least like to turn your choice of store in a more normal direction, okay? H-how about this one called Tropical Bright Girl?”

“That’s for hicks.”

“Go apologize to the people working there!! I promise I’ll bow down with you!!”

Kamijou could tell this was bad. From that store name alone, he could tell he would be thrown into a mysterious space of comedy. It would start with an “Okay, I’m going to go try this on”, and then “Oh, no! The changing room’s curtain!”, and finally a series of blows. He could not let that happen. He was with Leivinia Birdway, Lessar, Misaka Mikoto, and Index. If those four ganged up on him, he would turn into something unrecognizable! Kamijou Touma was not a pure saint. If the goddess of some spring appeared and asked him if he wanted her to wear a swimsuit made up of a lot of cloth or one made up of little cloth, he would choose the one with little cloth. He might even ask if no swimsuit at all was an option! However, his answer would change when he knew reaching out for it would cost him his life!!

(Wh-wh-wh-wh-what… What am I supposed to do? When it comes to the genre of girls’ swimsuits, Birdway and Lessar’s opinions pack more of a punch than mine. Can I not win with the logic of a guy!? What do I need to push this in a more normal direction!?)

“Ah! That’s it! Okay, okay, okay!! Kamijou-san suggests we hold a democratic vote! Where do people want to go: 50% Less Skin Covered or Tropical Bright Girl!?”

Birdway gave an understanding look.

“Don’t be shy, boy. You actually want to head in the direction of more skin, but you’re hesitant to boldly suggest it yourself, aren’t you? Don’t worry. We will give you the justification you need. Okay?”

“You’re being considerate of the exact opposite of my feelings!?”

“In fact, I’m fine with pointlessly stripping down right here.”

“Why would you do that!? That really is pointless!!”

This may be getting repetitive, but a romantic Kamijou Touma that wanted to pursue girls' bare skin did exist within him. However, his experiences told him this would end in a great tragedy brought on by his usual miraculous misfortune.

He had to bring this to an end somehow.

He did not want to leave behind the ultra silly dying words of "I think I've lost more blood at times like this than during World War III".

"(Misaka-san, Misaka-san! This is in your best interest, too. Could you help Kamijou-san out here?)"

"Eh? What? This has nothing to do with me. I have no plans to visit a tropical island, so why would I go into a swimsuit store and buy one?"

"(Letting your guard down will end up showing that truth is stranger than fiction by giving you a three bandage set.)"

"That has no connection to the past, present, or future, but it does seem like anything could happen when I'm with you. I don't want that!!"

"(And Index-san! Between 50% Less Skin Covered and Tropical Bright Girl, you would choose the latter, right? Right?)"

"I don't know what either of them are."

"But tropical sounds delicious, right?"

"You're right!! I agree with Touma!!"

"That was a complete non sequitur!" shouted Mikoto in surprise, but Kamijou did not care.

"Fwa ha ha ha ha!! With my vote added, that's three against two. Birdway, Lessar, your ambitions have come to their end!!"

"What? It's too soon to think you've won. Your suggestion has a single loophole."

"You aren't going to raise the cat's paw to make it three against three, are you?"

"This is a more fundamental issue." Birdway snapped her fingers and spun around the cell phone she pulled from her skirt pocket. "You said we would have a vote, but you never said who could vote or how many people could vote! In other words, I can gather as many reinforcements as I need with a single phone call! Boy, don't underestimate the personnel network of one of England's…no, one of Europe's…no, one of the world's leading magic cabals, the Dawn-Colored Sunlight!!"

“What!? I-if you can do that, then I can…”

“Are you going to get help from your friends and classmates? Do you really think that can stand up to the scale of the Dawn-Colored Sunlight that has spread across the world!? A democratic vote is essentially violence in numbers. You were quite the fool to challenge the boss of a magic cabal in that arena. Ha ha ha ha ha ha!!”

Birdway gave the perfect villainous boss laugh, typed out an email with her thumb, and sent it out to the world.

Countless responses arrived from a few seconds later to a few dozen seconds later.

That speed showed just how tightly she held the reigns of her men.

And then Birdway glanced down at the screen.

From: Mark Space

To: Leivinia Birdway.

Sub: We don’t have time for this nonsense. Have some sense.

Body: / /

It was an extremely rough email with no body.

“……”

“Okay, let’s begin the vote! Birdway?”

Kamijou Touma took on the role of host, but Birdway only stared at the cell phone screen while trembling and not raising a hand for either option.

The battle was over.

The Kamijou Party changed their destination from 50% Less Skin Covered to Tropical Bright Girl.

“Come to think of it, no one needs Kamijou-san in the store, right? I-in that case, I can wait here.”

He tried to compromise even further, but Birdway gave a cry of desperation.

“I told you the plan was to throw you in a supersonic passenger plane and send you anywhere in the world as soon as we got word, you fool! We need to stay a single group to make sure you don’t get lost at the crucial moment!!”

Kamijou ended up being dragged away like a vacuum cleaner being pulled along by a young housewife.

Mikoto and Index followed from a short distance.

“Hey, are things always this crazy with him? Do you never question the overwhelming unfairness of it all?”

“Touma’s usual chains of incidents go much further than this. This is still at about the third link on the chain.”

Kamijou walked around the shopping mall while being pulled along by Birdway’s small (and extraordinarily powerful) hand. He glanced at the different stores to see what they were selling.

They were all airport duty free stores, so they primarily sold what would function as souvenirs.

On top of that, there were a lot of fashion stores. Kamijou could only think they were targeting the fashionable people who were winning at life or that they wanted to give a fashionable impression of Academy City to the tourists and businessmen who came through. There were also plenty of stores that sold electronics, but all the products were very focused on design. They were all small devices with smart, streamlined shapes not seen in foreign models that looked like they could look up the day’s recommended recipe in a colorful kitchen. They looked like something from an economics magazine article titled “The Ideal IT Life of the World’s Top 100 Influential People!”

…Or so Kamijou had expected.

“What? These are all really old models.”

“That’s because these are duty free stores meant for visitors,” cut in Mikoto. “These are meant to be brought out as souvenirs, so putting in Academy City’s latest technology would allow the technology to leak out. In other words, everything here is kept at a level that is acceptable to have leak out.”

“Um… Then I don’t see how we could enjoy looking at any of this.”

“Ohh? Does this disappointment come from the sexy swimsuits you hoped to see those tea-drinking, cake-eating British nobles wearing? Is that what you mean? Is it?”

“Why!? Why is everything so difficult to deal with today!? Kamijou-san was only trying to find some small objective amid this hopeless away game of visiting a swimsuit store with a guy-girl ratio of 1 to 4! I was only desperately trying to turn my focus to the guy-like interests of electronics and gadgets! That’s all I was trying to do!!”

“D-don’t call me difficult to deal with!!”

“Ahh! Things just got even more difficult!!”

As his mental escape paths continued to dwindle, Index walked up next to Kamijou and spoke while holding the cat.

“I’m fine with any store as long as it has food.”

“You’ve finally reached the point that you’ll eat swimsuits? Or do you mean the cell phones?”

“I can smell cafés and bread shops all around here! That’s a café mocha and that’s a fresh butter roll!!”

“What kind of new skill is this!? Is your sense of smell the amazing part or is your accuracy when comparing the smell to your memories the amazing part!?”

“There may be a twenty or thirty year difference, but food doesn’t change! A fried egg was perfected as a fried egg a hundred years ago!! So there’s no problem!! As long as there’s food, I’ll eat it!!”

“Oh? Don’t underestimate the advances science has made, Silver Sister.”

“Touma!! Short Hair gave me a mean nickname!!”

“And what do you call that you called me!? Well!?”

Mikoto almost flew off track, but she used the power of her rationality to hold back.

“Research into the inosinic acid deeply related to the maturing of meat has advanced quite a ways in the past few years. A maturing method has been developed that uses supercooled water and endothermic alloys to cool raw meat with previously unheard of pattern graphs which really draws out the savory flavor. What is treated like trash meat here in Academy City is much better than the average in the outside world. In that case, what would A5 top-class meat here taste like?”

“Tooooouuummmmaaa

And so they soon arrived at the swimsuit shop.

The shops in the shopping mall were divided into small unit blocks. If a store wanted more space, it would rent two or three of those blocks and take out the walls between. The swimsuit store used only one block, so it was only as large as a small convenience store.

However…

“Wait a second. Do I really have to go in here? I’m not quite sure how to put it, but I feel some kind of…pressure.”

There was nothing particularly outrageous visible from outside and this store did not stand out from those around it.

It was merely a part of the scenery.

But. Kamijou could not enter that store as casually as he would a gyudon restaurant. He was not allowed to. He could feel an aura or pressure that told him as much. This in itself was no crime. The problem came from the store being a poor combination with a high school boy like Kamijou Touma. For example, no one would question seeing menstrual products lined up on a shelf at a drug store. If a suit-wearing OL or female teacher picked one up and carried it to the register, no one would bat an eye. But what if an obviously adolescent high school boy like Kamijou Touma brought that same product to the register? That combination was out of the question. That left nothing but mystery. Doing so was not a crime, but there would be a massive pressure over the short distance to the young woman at the register. That overwhelming pressure would be like the winds of a giant hurricane.

With that in mind, Kamijou glanced over at Mikoto.

“Why do we have to go look at swimsuits in November? Well, I could always go to the southern hemisphere for New Year’s.”

She was a bit annoyed, but was sucked in toward the entrance fairly easily.

What was going on? He turned to Index now.

“I smell a sweet aroma. Sphinx, I think this might be a heaven of fruit!”

She ran into the entrance for a reason completely unrelated to swimsuits.

And then Kamijou caught on.

“I get it now! This is like the pink tile barricade of the girls’ locker room!! Damn. It’s unfortunate, but there’s nothing I can do!!”

“Why do you know the girls’ locker room has pink tiles? Anyway, this isn’t a problem, so come on in.”

“Well, this store is for commoners instead of experts, so I don’t expect to find much. But I’ll post some half-truths about the place online if they don’t at least have a slingshot.”

However, the truth remained that their destination had changed from 50% Less Skin Covered to Tropical Bright Girl. This was no longer the hellish situation in which any option would ultimately lead to a head injury for Kamijou. He was guaranteed some safety!

Or so he wanted to believe. However, he could not help but feel a chill as he stood in front of the store.

The human tow truck that was Birdway dragged Kamijou into the dreadful pressure of that store.

Instead of shelves, the store contained several stainless steel rails. Each of those rails had over a hundred special hangers on them and countless swimsuits divided up the store like hedges.

The walls and ceiling were made of marble and the walls were covered in thick curtains despite there being no windows. The floor had a black and white checked pattern similar to a chess board. They may have wanted to give the place a luxurious feel, but the lights were so strong it had the bright atmosphere of a movie theater after the movie finished playing. Using only indirect lighting would have fixed that, but that would have made the colors of the products too hard to see. The store had definitely been created with the customers in mind.

“Oh? It looks like they at least have a full selection of micro bikinis. Ohh! Is this a ribbon swimsuit that uses silicon material to stick directly to your skin!? …You really can find the best things in the most unexpected places. I think I will be able to enjoy myself here! Gwa ha ha ha ha ha!!”

“You’re kidding me!! You promised Kamijou-san we would be going to a normal swimsuit store! If this is what’s considered normal, what kinds of swimsuits cover 50% less skin than this!?”

As Lessar grew overly excited, Kamijou held his head in his hands. Birdway then spoke up as she reached for one of the hangers with a swimsuit fixed on it.

“Hey, Kamijou Touma. I found a cow-print slingshot, but I think this kind of animal symbolism is going too far. As a guy, what would you think if you saw me wearing this?”

“Umm… That it was a self-deprecating joke?”

Kamijou's honest answer earned him a most welcome knee to the crotch that left him writhing on the ground. As Birdway threw the hangar back onto the stainless steel rail and went back to choosing a swimsuit, she showed no sign of concern for her servant.

"Hey. Wait. Hey!"

"Just a second, Misaka. This hopping around is important. To a middle school girl like you, it may look like I'm jumping around as a joke, but this is the brink between being able to return to the battle or not. Let me focus here. …I need to enter the zone for a moment."

"?"

Mikoto frowned and tilted her head as Kamijou jumped straight up two or three times and somehow managed to recover from the status effect.

He breathed a sigh of relief, but Mikoto did not understand any of it.

"Anyway, I'm going to look at the swimsuits over there."

"Why!? Do you have some reason to flee Japan!?"

The reason Birdway and Lessar wanted swimsuits in November was because they wanted to hide in a southern country on the other side of the world while the Anglican Church and other groups were pursuing them. That had nothing to do with Index or Mikoto. Kamijou could not let her get caught up in the moment and lose sight of the situation.

"No, but I think they made a new indoor pool in the leisure facilities of District 6. My mama said swimming is one secret to beauty, so this is a good opportunity. If I buy a swimsuit now, I can head to the indoor pool before I decide it's too much effort."

"Y-you don't need to make such a carefree decision in such a chaotic place. Wouldn't it be safer and easier to buy one at a sporting goods store later?"

"If I wait until later, I'll just decide it's too much effort. And the swimsuits in that corner look normal enough, so I'm just going to look through them," said Mikoto. "Also, if you peek on me while I'm choosing, *I'll kill you*. I'm not joking."

"Don't worry. Don't worry. You don't need to bother with a warning. No matter what you do, I always end up on the verge of death."

He tried to casually turn aside the comment and ended up with a one billion volt lightning spear flying toward him.

If it had not been for his "right hand of mystery", he might very well have died.

“Don’t scare me like that!! Do you have some kind of grudge against Kamijou-san!?”

“Pay attention to what people say to you. Hmph.”

With that comment, she headed to another corner of the store.

This left only Kamijou and Index.

“Just so you know, Kamijou-san is quite relieved that you stay the same no matter where you are, Index-san.”

“Ahh… I don’t see how you can care about swimsuits when it’s so cold. More importantly, Touma, when will the delicious bread, cake, black tea, red bean soup, matcha, coffee, and hot dogs be served?”

“Way too many of those are from the same genre. And that’s too much caffeine, sugar, and carbs!! What could possibly bring you to that combination!?”

“All those different smells are floating around, so I can’t help it!!”

“I’m not really sure what ‘it’ is that you can’t help!! W-wait a second. Are you the type of person that would cause devastating damage if I brought you to a fish market!?”

“Heh heh heh. Are you talking about the legendary Tsukiji Market, Touma? Of course I would go around eating everything! In fact, when will you take me there!? I’m really interested in seeing Ryugu-jo, that fantastical kingdom made up of countless types of seafood, revived in the modern age!!”

It seemed there would be devastating damage even if the rescued turtle brought Index to Ryugu-jo. She would see Otohime and the others who greeted her as nothing more than one half of “beef or fish”, so she would show less mercy than Momotarou on Onigashima.

Kamijou doubted he would get any support from the cat in Index’s arms. The cat’s shameless expression seemed to say, “Do you find it sad? This is survival of the fittest.”

Meanwhile, Mikoto returned to Kamijou and Index.

She held a hanger with a swimsuit on it.

“I made up my mind, so I’m going to buy it. …Don’t look at it.”

“What? Are you a comedian in front of a boiling bath? Are you saying you actually want me to-…prhah!?”

Mikoto fired a lightning spear for each naïve question.

It seemed she could not stand having the sight of a girl and a new swimsuit remind him of a man in his forties in a clichéd situation. However, Kamijou Touma was not the type to notice such subtle things.

Mikoto had chosen a sporty one-piece that looked like a racing swimsuit with more focus on streamlined design. Kamijou's imagination may have been lacking, but it did not look particularly revealing from what he could see on the hangar.

And so the boy gave his opinion.

"That's not really something you need to hide, is it?"

"Wha-!? I told you not to look!!"

"It doesn't look that much different from a school swimsuit."

"You idiot! It's completely different!! Don't tell me you're the type who looks at a fashion magazine and complains that all the clothes look the same! Look. This part here and this part here are completely different!!"

Mikoto blushed and began arguing her point while pointing here and there on the swimsuit.

Having her fashion sense questioned seemed to have caused the blood to rush to her head, but this resulted in destroying the original condition of not looking at the swimsuit she had chosen.

The more Kamijou tilted his head, the more Commentator Misaka Mikoto-san (14) increased the speed of her gesturing.

And then…

The cloth of the swimsuit in Mikoto's hand peeled right off from just below the chest all the way down to the very bottom of the abdomen.

This shocking removal reduced its defense stat by 85%.

As Kamijou watched on, he silently covered his face with both hands and crouched down on the ground.

He let out a groaning voice.

"……Misaka has finally broken, too."

"N-no! Idiot!! I didn't know about this!!"

“And now she’s started zapping things!! Is the end of the century about to begin? No, there’s still time! If I can defeat Misaka before the flames spread to Birdway and Lessar, I should be able to avoid a truly hopeless situation!!”

“Defeat!? What do you mean defeat!?”

“Okay, Misaka-chan. Go on, go on. Blush and put that swimsuit back now that you’ve changed your mind.”

“That’s what you meant!?”

As she was pushed from behind and led with the uncaring motions of a construction worker making 900 yen an hour as he guided traffic around the construction zone, Mikoto returned to where she had gotten the swimsuit. There was a lot she wanted to say, but she wanted to avoid having him think she was intent on buying that swimsuit.

Kamijou Touma’s plan had worked this time.

However, there was no guarantee things would go so smoothly every time.

He was not a martial arts master whose motions were like the branches of a willow tree.

And if a billion volts or metal flying at three times the speed of sound hit him, he would seriously die. On both the science side and magic side “Kyah! Pervert!” situations were done on reflex, so there would be no discretion or mercy. Bringing together girls who had great firepower was more dangerous than mixing different cleaning agents.

(I need to stay as docile as possible. Jizou mode on!)

Trying to leave the store could draw the girls’ attention, but he desperately wanted to avoid helping them excitedly choose a showy swimsuit followed by some unexpected misunderstanding. He would not let it happen. He had to deal with Index, Misaka Mikoto, Leivinia Birdway, Lessar, and the calico kitty. That was too much firepower. Any reflexive and impulsive strike brought on by shyness (and targeting Kamijou Touma) would clearly exceed the max damage value. An outsider might think it sounded like something to add to a daily album, but the situation could literally smash his body to pieces. He wanted to avoid that at all costs.

(Your mind is empty, Kamijou-san, your mind is empty. …First, I need to move from the most dangerous spot. That would be the dressing rooms lining the wall. I can’t imagine how approaching them could be a positive thing for my life.)

Kamijou moved toward the opposite wall to distance himself from the wall giving off a difficult to detect but definitely present negative aura.

For some reason, there were a few chairs without backs sitting near the thick curtain on the wall.

Kamijou sat down in one and breathed a sigh of relief because nothing had happened. He truly entered Jizou mode and tried to make time pass more quickly by becoming a sensory "time traveler to the future".

"(Adolescence is like a wild beast that can attack at any time.)"

By the time Kamijou heard that girl's voice and tried to destroy his Jizou field from within, it was already too late.

He was grabbed by the back of the neck and pulled backwards.

Kamijou Touma suddenly disappeared from the area covered by the store's security cameras.

"Wh-whaaat!? There was nothing but a wall behind me. H-how did I end up here? I've already been attacked, but I can't tell what happened. D-don't tell me! Do you have a power that lets you freely control an alternate space that ignores Euclidean geometry!?"

"C'mon. If you struggle too much, the others will realize we're hiding behind the curtain."

It was Lessar.

For some reason, she had been hiding behind the curtain and she now looked down at Kamijou's sitting form with the eyes of a feline toying with its prey.

"Wait! What possible reason do you have for this!? What are you going to do to Kamijou-san now that you have dragged him in here!?"

"With someone as experienced as you, something will definitely interfere if I try to use any normal approach. …It was New Light that wanted to use someone with such rare ability, so I'm not going to sit idly by while a big shot like the Dawn-Colored Sunlight barges in before the enticement plan is complete."

"???"

"More importantly, it looked like there was a full complement of people perfect for interfering with this kind of thing. With the stereotypical dressing room under such heavy guard, I had no choice but to use a trickier method."

"What do you mean experienced!? And I get the feeling this strange difference in opinions will lead to serious trouble… L-Lessar-san! Let's calmly go over our thoughts so we can be on the same page!!"

"Shut up. If you don't go along with this, I'll strip naked and then strip you naked too."

"What kind of unprecedented suicide strategy is that!?"

“Fwa ha ha. If you are seen naked with an innocent girl outside of the dressing room zone, what will the six billion people of the world decide happened?”

“Wh-what do you want?”

“Tah dah! You get to decide what swimsuit I wear!!”

At some point, a swimsuit hanger had appeared in each of Lessar’s hands.

“Okay, Kamijou Touma. Did you drop this sexy black wired bikini? Or was it this sexy white skeleton one-piece?”

“Those names are too specialized for me to know what they mean and I get the feeling either option will not end well!!”

“Oh, by the way, an honest person gets a lovely present as a third option.”

“I can only assume that means I have a time limit!!”

Lessar gave a disappointed sigh when she saw Kamijou looking as cowardly indecisive as someone ordered to disarm a precision time bomb while blindfolded.

“Um, as you can see, the wired bikini is a bikini made almost entirely out of wires. The triangular portion is nothing but a wire outer frame. But that would show off something that shouldn’t be seen, so a triangle of cloth has been placed in the opposite direction of the triangular frame to hide the important part.”

“So it’s basically a deadly weapon! Got it!!”

“But as the name suggests, the skeleton one-piece is essentially a perfectly normal one-piece swimsuit. It isn’t that different from the ones worn by girls at Japanese schools.”

“Sigh… So there’s actually a normal option. In that case-…”

“But when it gets wet, it becomes perfectly see-through.”

“Then it’s pointless!! It’s entirely pointless!!”

“Oh, the crotch of course has a different cloth attached on the inside. Then again, it’s only the size of a bandage. It’s actually hard to tell it has that extra cloth there. It ends up looking more like some air happened to get inside so that spot isn’t touching the skin.”

At any rate, both options would cause the lifeguards to begin shrilly blowing their whistles anywhere but at a nudist beach. In an RPG, the swimsuits would probably have strange curses.

Kamijou raised his knees, buried his face in them, and spoke his thoughts in a groaning voice.

“Lessar. Living in a small island nation like this can sometimes make it hard to tell what is normal for the rest of the world.”

“What are you talking about? These are special terms that would only be recognizable somewhere as advanced as Academy City. If you searched these swimsuit names on the internet outside, you probably wouldn’t find anything.”

“All of a sudden, I have no idea what Academy City is trying to do!! Are you saying this will be the norm around the world in twenty or thirty years!?”

“By the way, wearing the wired bikini over the skeleton one-piece would bring out a different style altogether. Heh heh. It would be like a cocktail of sexy swimsuits.”

“Is that the punishment for running out of time!?”

Kamijou had the feeling his life would switch over to a completely different and amusing set of rails if he was naturally able to give a gourmet-like comment here.

In the right hand was a black wired bikini.

In the left hand was a white skeleton one-piece.

“Now, which will you choose?”

A spiritual item that resembled an arrow-shaped tail extended from Lessar’s miniskirt as she spoke with the expression of a demon asking him to sign a contract.

“Which one!?”

Part 2

The air was cold and wrapped in mist-like weather.

The Lightning God Thor walked through Sargasso, the headquarters of Gremlin made from a great number of ruined ships.

Technically, this was Ollerus disguised as Thor.

(Now then.)

This environment was not foolish enough to let him bring in a cell phone with GPS functionality.

The quickest way to find Sargasso's location would be to check on the location of the stars and sun.

But at the same time, this was Magic God Othinus's base and she was currently focusing all of her power and skill on producing that lance. While she was focusing all her senses to eliminate as many impurities as possible, she would take issue with any magic Ollerus used that was not related to Gremlin's actions.

Even Ollerus could not survive if he was surrounded here.

Then again, the most fundamental problem was his inability to defeat the magic god on his own.

(I could cause some serious trouble and secretly use investigation magic in the middle of that…but that won't work here. The smaller the trick the better. The odds are good Othinus would detect my preparations for the diversion.)

Due to his great power, Ollerus did not seem the type for this kind of covert attack.

However, he had lived a peaceful life as a recluse while slipping through the gaps in the Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and other world powers' search networks. That great power of his had given him the skills at covert operations that not even your average intelligence agent or spy had.

(That means I need to go about this the normal way.)

Sargasso was made up of the rusted ruins of everything from small boats to naval ships, but the members of Gremlin preferred to use the luxurious passenger ship that had broken in half. It seemed even crazy magicians found a high-class hotel room more comfortable than a cave.

Ollerus crossed a makeshift bridge that looked like a ladder on its side and made his way inside the passenger ship.

"Marian."

"Hm? What is it, Thor?"

The brown girl was holding some strange device with a lot of red and flesh-color on it. She turned toward Ollerus and frowned.

"I'm about to be pretty busy, so I can't do anything for you. Aren't you supposed to be guarding the perimeter of Sargasso?"

“I already performed the final check before the real deal begins. You know what my output is. Since I can’t use Mjölnir, I’ll have to head out as Almighty Thor. But I don’t want to go nuts with no limitations and hinder the production of the lance. I’ve had enough of Othinus cutting off my arm.”

“That would be bad for both of us. I’m not taking the blame for a mistake here. I’d rather not lose my head because of you.”

“As long as our magical symbols don’t overlap or conflict, nothing should happen. What direction are you going to draw power in from when you put together your temple? I can ask Bersi about the scientific stuff, so that only leaves the reactor.”

“Wait, wait. I have a memo pad in my right pocket. You can check that.”

When one wanted to avoid any illegitimate and unnecessary actions, sticking to the legitimate actions was best. When performing a large-scale ceremony, the effects of ley lines and the movement of the stars had to be taken into consideration. For that reason, one had to check on the terrain and coordinates.

If he could not use investigation magic, he just had to get his hands on the data that was already there.

He could gather that data without Magic God Othinus catching on.

While holding the memo pad filled with Gremlin’s secrets that could not be viewed so easily, Ollerus thought to himself.

(She must be the type with a strict line between enemy and ally. This is what she’s like once she thinks of you as an ally.)

“Hm.”

He flipped through the memo pad evenly. He found a page on which Marian had written down the information on the sun and stars she had calculated out, but flipped right past the information he wanted and looked through every page. He did not want her to know he was focused on a single point.

“*Got it. Got it*. I understand the gist of it. There shouldn’t be an issue.”

“Is that so? That’s good.”

“One other thing. Mökkurkalfe is Freyja’s territory, but it’s a mountain-like giant made of clay. It can change the ley lines around it *as if a mountain really does exist where it is standing*. Once the actual production of the lance begins, keep an eye on its location.”

“I know that. I’m more interested in its core. You know, that heart on the plate. Even though it’s exposed like that, it still beats like a proper heart. Just seeing it makes my mouth water.”

“How about you have Freyja give it to you once this is over?” said Ollerus with a shrug.

“I’ll do that,” she replied honestly.

It seemed this brown girl’s sensibility was different from the others.

Ollerus parted ways with Marian Slingeneyer and continued down the corridor.

(Now I need a method of getting this data out. Once again, using any unnecessary magic would alert Othinus. I need some way of disguising it.)

At that point, Ollerus stopped thinking and turned a corner in the corridor.

He had spotted Bersi walking down the corridor with a pace as regulated as the second hand of a clock.

He could not meet with him.

Bersi was different from a pure human or a pure spiritual item. There were several ways of deceiving a living being and several ways of deceiving an inorganic object, but he wanted to avoid meeting with that man who was somewhere in between. Of course, acting too suspiciously to avoid meeting him would be getting his priorities backwards.

(I need to deceive them using a legitimate line.)

Ollerus thought for a moment.

(In that case, I can use that “heart on the plate” mentioned just now. That heart kept here in Sargasso is the driving force for that giant, mountain-like Mökkurkalfe. It’s set up to control it remotely. I should be able to borrow that line and send a message to my contact with the Anglican Church.)

Part 3

In the UN headquarters building in New York, one of the several small conference rooms was filled with the light of fluorescent lights. It was filled with those who directly ruled a nation, supported one from where the light of the sun did not reach, or mentally supported the people as religious symbols.

America.

England.

Vatican City.

Russia.

France.

“To sum up,” said the presidential aide Roseline Krackhart in order to check back over everything.

Unsurprisingly, an adult woman like her chose how to speak based on who she was speaking to. She was sensible enough to not enter full S mode and verbally crush a foreign head of state under her foot.

“This illegal force named Gremlin has a hidden base called Sargasso somewhere on the seven seas and they are developing a weapon of mass destruction called a lance. They will not hesitate to use it and there is a great danger of them using it as soon as it is complete without bothering with negotiations. …Does that properly cover the information that has been discussed thus far?”

There was a reason she had repeated all that.

When the British or Russians had been speaking, there had been a lot of terms she had not understood: magic, magic power, spell, spiritual item, ley line, demon god, Dvergr, holistic esper, Gungnir. The United States of America was in part a religious nation that promised freedom to worship any number of religions with Protestantism being first and foremost. However, when Roseline saw these people seriously discussing all this in front of her, it ended up sounding like a very distant issue. It was as if they were philosophically analyzing the world of some picture book.

World War III.

Hawaii and Baggage City.

The conspiracies of the military-industrial complex that America knew so well were not enough to fully explain the great force that had left its mark on the history of the world. Roseline had even been directly involved in one of those.

But even so, it lost any hint of reality whenever she thought back over it. It felt as if her own memories were wrong and that forgetting any of it had happened was the right thing to do.

She could not sustain a sense of danger.

The memories faded all too quickly.

Before she could come up with an actual countermeasure, it all grew muddled and vanished into the shadows of history. Just like the odd jobs of everyday life stole away one's free time, this disaster that should have been their top priority as the world police was dissolving away into the passage of time.

Something like this may have been more frightening than direct violence.

That was why she had restated it in her own words.

This was something the conspiracies of the military-industrial complex could not fully explain, so she had to make sure the phenomenon did not escape the common sense in her own mind.

Otherwise, she felt she would lose more and more information once that first bit leaked out.

"That's more or less accurate," lightly commented the head of the British Royal Family. She was Queen Elizard. "This information comes from a spy inside Gremlin. He is quite skilled. To be honest, he is so skilled not even we can control him. What matters most is the creation of the lance at Sargasso. To be blunt, this is very dangerous. If we do nothing, it will be completed in less than half a day. And if that happens, the six billion people of earth have no chance of winning."

"I don't really get it," said United States President Roberto Katze. "But can I think of this lance like a nuclear weapon?"

"Can a single nuclear weapon kill every single one of the planet's six billion people? If not, then think of this as a new weapon. Call it a supernova missile or a black hole bomb or whatever you want, but this gives someone that fantastical power in reality."

"This is on such a large scale, it might be difficult for it to feel real," added the young Patriarch at the top of the Russian Orthodox Church. He did not directly cut in because he was the leader of a religion that put an emphasis on mental activity. "If this Othinus becomes a complete magic god, a world will come where all that power can be wielded at the discretion of a single individual. If she takes a liking to you, you will gain vast riches. If you irritate her, she will slaughter you. …We do not actually know what Gremlin's ultimate objective is, but an age will come where a single individual's ideals cover the entire world. In that age, straying from those ideals even slightly will be enough to have your severed head displayed in the public square."

"That great power will remain forever, but an individual's ideals will not necessarily remain the same."

This time, the Roman pope spoke up.

The pope had been replaced during the confusion of World War III, so the position was now held by an old man named Pietro Yogdis.

“It may begin as a truly idealistic reality. Evil may be temporarily wiped out, people’s negative thoughts may be removed, and miraculous solutions may be found to the planetary concerns of the remaining fossil fuel resources and the destruction of the environment. …But how long will that last? Five years? Ten years? Fifty years? One hundred years? If a single gear falls out of place somewhere, an eternal age of personal pleasure and slaughter may begin. With no doctrine to follow, an individual’s mind is made to easily stray no matter how strong their will is. Normally, that mind is corrected by many external factors, but here…”

“If the one with power strays from the proper path, no one can tell a magic god she is doing something wrong. Handing the decision-making power for the world to a pure child does not mean the world will become pure,” said a blond woman with a sickly complexion.

She had been confined deep underground in France for a long time but had still functioned as the cornerstone to the country’s important political decisions.

“So before this ‘untouchable baby’ grows too fat, she must be stopped. Someone must stop her while she can still be stopped,” said Queen Regnant Elizard immediately. “What matters is the location of Sargasso. Even if we only have half a day, Gremlin has not finished making this lance. That means this is our last chance. This specialized spiritual item will let her control her power as a magic god. …Its creation has to be a delicate process. If the world gathers its strength and attacks Sargasso, the shock could be enough to drive the creation of the lance to failure.”

Elizard did not say it would be enough to defeat the magic god.

As an anti-magician expert, she could not view the situation so optimistically.

“And how do we find it?” casually asked President Roberto Katze. “I don’t know any details about magic, but this place won’t show up on the cameras of normal satellites or surveillance drones, right? These…magicians rely on manual methods. How are you going to search every corner of the globe like that? The seven seas cover 70% of the earth’s surface. Do you know how many tens of thousands of meters the earth’s circumference is? It’s impossible to check through all of that in only twelve hours.”

“It is not impossible,” immediately replied Elizard.

Roseline was taken aback, but the queen continued regardless.

“We can divide 70% of the earth’s surface into a thousand blocks and send five magicians to each block. For the magical nation of England, it is not hard to find that many people. A magical investigation of the entire globe would be quite difficult, but it can be done using overwhelming numbers and common spells for investigating a limited area. This is the strength of working on a national level.”

She was also revealing that England had a secret transportation network that allowed them to fill the entire world with those known as magicians without anyone knowing. This statement held great meaning diplomatically and defensively.

But Elizard showed little sign of caring.

“Hm? If we’re talking about playing dirty, the Roman Catholic Church has us beat by a long shot. After all, they are the world’s largest denomination and have two billion followers. All of them at least have a cross around their neck and the many churches and cathedrals that are the nearby symbols of their faith exist all over the world. …What if they have some large-scale magic that uses all of those together? It seems to me there is a much more massive pool of data resources there than in the recent conspiracies about SNSs and online stores.”

“I can think of a few, but those projects were all completely frozen upon the destruction of God’s Right Seat. And they will not see the light of day again as long as I am around. That is my duty as the inheritor of this position.”

Despite being in the middle of an (unofficial) international conference, Roseline let out a sigh.

She was reminded of the legendary Echelon during the Cold War or the F.C.E. surveillance system that had covered America and had been controlled by a single corporation. This made both of those seem like nothing.

“In other words, you have already constructed a limited system for locating enemies all over the world. Is that what you are saying?”

“Yes. But only on the level of expert magicians. Given Gremlin’s habit of disregarding profit, there is a risk of overlooking Sargasso if we only search for it from outside.”

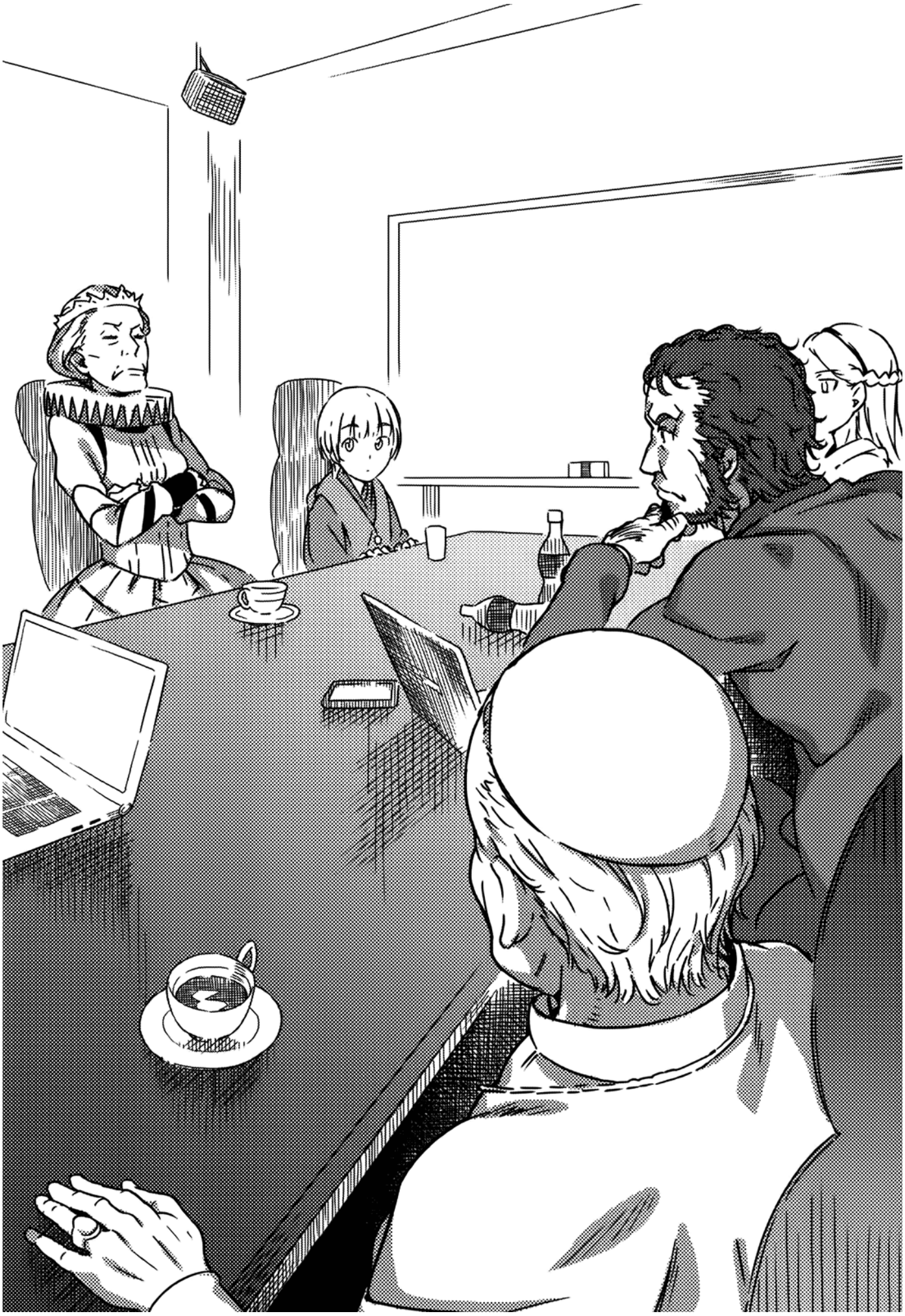
“And that is what the spy is for, is that it?” said the Russian Orthodox Church’s young Patriarch in a heavy tone of voice. “Sargasso is probably hidden by a special barrier, but the British magicians scattered throughout the world will be able to detect the signal sent from within. Is that right?”

They had known this from the beginning.

They only repeated it to make sure everyone understood and to bridge the gap between those who knew about magic and those who did not.

There was no need for discussion because there was no other effective method.

Elizard slowly spoke up.



“The standard forces will primarily come from America, Russia, England, and France. The magical forces will be led by England, Rome, Russia, and France. This will require some countries to do double duty. Are any changes necessary?”

“That is not a problem.”

“I do not recall having such a weakly-made country.”

Russia and France readily agreed.

The focus then turned to Elizard and President Roberto.

“If we do locate Sargasso, how much firepower can you use?”

“The House is still practically boiling over in their desire for revenge over Hawaii. I’m stopping it from getting anywhere, but I can get immediate approval for an attack on Sargasso if I open up the gas. I can officially use the military stationed at four overseas bases in allied nations and if Sargasso is in international waters or the territorial waters of America, the EU, or any other allied nation, I can fire ballistic missiles in the name of having a test launch. I can’t use any NBC weapons, but I can at least fill the warhead with bunker clusters.”

“Hm?” Elizard frowned. “I thought we had a treaty banning those. I seem to recall my military-obsessed daughter shouting shrilly about it.”

“As usual, the world’s largest possessor of them didn’t ratify that. …Also, could you introduce me to this daughter sometime? I’m sure we’ll get along great. She’d probably clap her hands in joy if I gave her a tour of Area 51.”

“If you are after her body, go to the corner of the room and use your right hand instead. Ahem. Anyway, the normal military forces will run into trouble if Sargasso is in the territorial waters of a neutral or enemy nation or territory. We do not have time to try trickery.”

“In that case, we’ll have to rely on this Secret CIA Notebook☆ that thoroughly covers diplomacy, trade, major industries, and the sentiments of the people.”

The aide Roseline Krackhart’s cheek visibly twitched.

That was apparently not something he should have said during an international conference.

“We have important people from America, Russia, England, France, and the Vatican. Even if they do not get along with one of us, they will likely have a close relationship with another. And the country in question would never be able to recover if the thick pillar of that relationship were broken. The only question left is who the dirty work will fall to.

Who will put a few cracks in that thick pillar to force this through? This should work no matter what country it ends up being."

"I just hope it does not turn into a century-long grudge," groaned Roseline as she spoke quietly to the president.

"Which is better, that or having the world destroyed today? To be honest, I'm not sure I can answer that," replied Roberto.

Fortunately, they would not be wiping out an enemy hiding in a large city of the target nation. They would only be attacking a ship graveyard on the ocean. There was almost no chance of collateral damage. They were only targeting an uninhabited island. It would officially be recorded as a request to use the military power of the world to attack a pile of trash in their country. Air-to-surface missiles cost one million yen each and stealth fighters cost twenty billion yen each, so there would probably be a lot of confusion over why they were doing it.

"So," said the Russian Patriarch. "Any guesses where Sargasso is?"

"An area of the ocean with close ties to Norse mythology. And they went to Hawaii for the volcanic energy, so somewhere without any submarine volcanoes or at least with no active ones."

An internal phone began to beep.

Roseline picked up the receiver just as Elizard spoke.

"Here's my guess: the North Sea or the sea near Iceland."

Part 4

The black wired bikini.

The white skeleton one-piece.

Either one would be full skin mode. Everything was happening so fast that Kamijou half expected Lessar to begin changing right in front of him. And unfortunately, not all people could be brought to the new era. He would probably lose his life after having his skull bitten off by Index. However, Lessar did not seem kind enough to end this because they had run out of time.

That was when Kamijou Touma's survival instincts instantly and explosively increased the functionality of his brain.

This was the same thing that occasionally happened during his run-ins with expert magicians.

“Lessar, think back. Do you remember what you said?”

“Hanya?”

“The white skeleton one-piece becomes see-through everywhere but the crotch when wet. And the hidden crotch looks more like it just so happened to not stick to your skin because some air got in.”

Kamijou Touma forcefully grabbed the hangar containing the black wired bikini.

“So here is my choice!!”

“Eh? You want me to wear the wired bikini?”

“No!! You put the wired bikini on first and then wear the skeleton one-piece over it!! You will wear that combination!!”

Kamijou made his announcement in such a loud voice it seemed like lightning should have struck behind him.

“If there is some air or any other kind of gap between the cloth and the skin, you cannot see through the skeleton one-piece!! The wired bikini is a crazy swimsuit that creates the pattern of a bikini by placing wires as a frame, but the silhouette alone looks like a normal bikini. The wired frames and the upside down triangles of cloth will push up from the inside, causing the same effect as having air inside. It will merely look like you are wearing a black swimsuit underneath a white swimsuit. The exposure will be no different from a normal bikini!! And thus you will have no eroticism left!!!!!”

“Wh-what!?”

Lessar’s expression made it look like she had been struck by another bolt of lightning.

“I give you the two sexiest swimsuits I can find and you find a way to escape without a hint of sexiness? How much of an expert are you!? Y-you were not on this level when we were wandering through the snowy plains of Russia!!”

“Hah hah hah!! Do you have any idea how many times I have been unfairly bitten by Index!? Kamijou-san has overcome all that pain, built up tear-filled experiences, and continued to move ever forward! I will not let girls push me around any longer!!”

Kamijou Touma gathered strength below his stomach to speak while using abdominal breathing that would surprise an opera singer.

“Watch in frightened awe as Kamijou-san comes up with an answer no one ever expected and stands on a brand new stage!!”

Kamijou let out a roar of victory as he held the wired bikini hangar in his right hand and the skeleton one-piece hanger in his left.

And then…

The thick decorative curtain was forcefully drawn to the side. Index, Misaka Mikoto, and Leivinia Birdway stood on the other side with blank expressions.

He had just barely made it.

If Lessar had begun changing, Kamijou Touma would have gained one more memory stained with blood due to a great misunderstanding.

But…

“…Touma.”

“Don’t tell me…”

“Everyone is free to have their own tastes, but that’s going a bit too far…”

This was odd. Their reaction made no sense. The elation filling Kamijou Touma silently froze over and he finally regained the ability to view the situation objectively.

A girl was on her knees after having those sexy swimsuits ripped from her grasp.

And a high school boy was holding those sexy swimsuits while declaring “Watch in frightened awe as Kamijou-san comes up with an answer no one ever expected and stands on a brand new stage!!”

If this led to the misunderstanding he was thinking of…

“N-no!! You…you have it all wrong. I didn’t take these from Lessar because I want to wear them! D-don’t be ridiculous. That misunderstanding is just too out of left field. I mean…think about it! That won’t make anyone happy!! Not a single person!!”

He had expected a fierce barrage of abuse based on the misunderstanding.

But for some reason, the girls would not look Kamijou in the eye. Their blank expressions looked past him.

“W-well, our father in heaven respects human free will…”

“It’s a good thing this is a free country. (deadpan)”

“I seem to have been a bit mistaken about Japan’s culture. I suppose it makes sense. This is the country that has always loved the fundoshi. I had completely forgotten.”

There was not a single “You pervert!” or biri biri.

The situation did not turn toward action. It was ruled by a perfect stillness.

“W-wait! Please don’t go!! Th-this…This isn’t right. I never knew having no grand tsukkomi could be so heartrending. I may have won, but I didn’t get anything for it. At least let me explain everything!!”

Part 5

Carissa was unmistakably Britain’s second princess and also the woman who had plotted a revolution to usurp the throne.

William Orwell was a mercenary who had once conquered under the name Acqua of the Back.

And Knight Leader was the man who led one of the magical forces of England as the head of the knights.

Two of them had been imprisoned in the Tower of London on the charges of treason (Knight Leader had not been charged with a crime, but he had his own issues), but they had been temporarily released for an emergency situation.

They stood in a naval port on the northernmost edge of Scotland.

Carissa spat out some words while the sea breeze struck her cheek in the darkness of the night.

“I can’t believe they brought out the princess who lost Curtana and the injured man whose insides have been churned up. England must be really shorthanded right now. Mr. Macho, will you really be any help?”

“I have of course lost my powers as a member of God’s Right Seat and as a Saint. However, the methodology for freely manipulating great power still remains within me. I can parry, deflect, and otherwise handle whatever your average magician can throw at me.”

“You are speaking to the second princess, you know? You certainly treat her differently from the third princess,” muttered Knight Leader in shock.

That third princess had not been informed of this personnel usage. She was usually quite gentle and obedient, but she would likely come along while carrying a giant crossbow if she knew William was heading to the battlefield with his severe wounds still unhealed.

That sheltered girl (or rather, princess) had gained a desire to take action during a certain incident, but it had a way of working out for the better or for the worse depending on the situation.

And if the third princess took into consideration that the young second princess would be together with William the mercenary, the target of her crossbow might change considerably. That was another reason to keep her in the dark.

“How many of the mobile fortresses can we use?”

“The recently commissioned Queen Mermaid and Hotel Ariel for sure. It might be difficult to get Fly in the Heavens ready in time. The others are either in for maintenance or needed to maintain a military balance elsewhere.”

“But World War III is over…”

“The ones that were not ready in time for the war are just now being completed. We had hoped to retire them without ever once using them as a sign of peace, but oh well.”

The fact that such large-scale mobile fortresses were being prepared suggested a certain fact.

Namely, they had had a decent guess as to Sargasso’s location from the beginning.

While the mobile fortresses could move quickly across the sea and through the air, they could only be deployed instantly within a certain range. Carissa, William, and Knight Leader were making preparations under the assumption that the enemy base would be located within that range.

“The North Sea or the sea near Iceland, hm?”

“Do you know what month it is? If we’re unlucky, we’ll have to head into the Arctic. A naval battle at this time of year should be exciting. The cold of winter is a great enemy that has frozen even tanks. Check the weather forecast down to the minute. Taking the weather lightly will lead to nothing good.”

“If Gremlin is staying in such an extreme environment, does the location hold some special meaning?”

Knight Leader was a member of adult society, so he spoke differently depending on if he was speaking to his old friend William or the second princess.

“The reports we have received make it clear they are based in Norse mythology. However, the spread of Christianity destroyed most of the documents on Norse mythology throughout Europe. …And the name of their base is Sargasso. There may be a spot in the ocean where fragments and ruins of ships have gathered after floating aimlessly for hundreds of years. There may be more documents remaining on the ocean than on land where they have been destroyed by fire or acid rain.”

And it was not just those three who thought Sargasso was in the North Sea or the sea near Iceland.

Otherwise, Knight Leader would never have been removed as the Queen Regnant’s bodyguard in New York. Elizard was not narrow-minded enough to let a grudge from the past affect others. In fact, Carissa and William were only imprisoned in the Tower of London because they had refused her amnesty and entered the cells on their own.

There was a job more important than protecting the queen while she visited another country.

Knight Leader stood here now because Elizard had made that decision.

And it had likely been more than just Elizard. Anyone belonging to a group familiar with magic would have guessed at the same place before the investigation even began. No one had said anything, but a large number of magicians were waiting for the signal to attack while in the cities bordering the northern seas of the EU.

And then a cell phone rang.

It was Knight Leader’s.

As the young man answered, Second Princess Carissa gave him a sidelong glance and spat out some more words.

“It looks like we won’t get to use Fly in the Heavens. We’ll have to use Queen Mermaid and Hotel Ariel to their fullest. …Let’s make them regret ever trying something like this right in front of us.”

Part 6

The misunderstanding had been resolved.

It had to have been resolved.

(Please let it be resolved!!)

Kamijou could only hope, but for some reason, Index, Misaka Mikoto, and Birdway disturbingly gave him an oddly kind smile and unconditionally agreed with him like yes-men.

“I don’t want to be here anymore,” muttered Kamijou blankly.

The group only replied kindly once more. Birdway and Lessar stopped choosing swimsuits without purchasing anything and led Kamijou out of the store.

Lessar understood the truth, but her ability to think properly had been destroyed by the sense of defeat from having him so splendidly escape her erotic trap.

For the moment, they had decided to calm down and find somewhere to drink tea, so they were searching for a café.

However, this was surprisingly difficult. It was not that they could not find a café in the airport shopping mall. The problem was the great number of them. Kamijou felt putting over a thousand stores in the same building had been overkill. There were too many redundant stores.

It was often said that humans had trouble choosing when there were too many options. Index’s revolutionary idea of going around to all of them and ordering coffee and sandwiches at each one had been immediately rejected.

Kamijou and Lessar were useless now that their spirits had been broken, so the uproar over which café to go to was mostly between Misaka Mikoto and Birdway. They each seemed oddly picky about it (and mostly in a negative way). Having a single high-class girl with you was convenient and added some beauty, but this scene proved that gathering more than one together was never a good idea.

While Kamijou’s soul was partially detached from his body in search of an escape path, a girl’s voice called out to him from behind.

“Hm? Oh, that guy over there is…Kamijou Touma was it? What are you doing here instead of at school?”

It was a maid with an outfit eccentrically colored in the yellow and black of a bee.

Technically, she was only a maid in training. She was a student at Ryouran Maid School.

Her name was Kumokawa Maria.

“Touma has won over another girl I didn’t know about!!”

“What do you do to know so many girls!?”

“I do not know who she is, but perhaps I should study your unstoppable skill at creating connections between people. It could be useful for the cabal.”

“Heh…heh heh. First you escape my sex appeal and then you treat me like this? I need to study more to make sure I am not lost within the crowd.”

Everyone except for Kamijou and the calico cat exchanged a glance. The look said, “What? Do none of you know this girl?”

A lot of what had happened in Baggage City had occurred in something like a black box.

Meanwhile, Kamijou began speaking with this potential maid who had wonderful black ringlet curls.

(Oh, it’s almost heavenly to have a friend who hasn’t made any strange misunderstandings.)

“Why aren’t you at school? Aren’t you a middle school student?”

“I am in the middle of some on-site training. I have to use different languages to guide foreign businessmen. And with a smile so they do not find me suspicious or annoying. I wish the EU would standardize its language like it did its currency.”

It was obvious Kamijou could not keep up with this, so Mikoto shrugged and spoke.

“She needs to learn how to actually speak the language rather than just read the textbook. The etiquette and position one takes with a guest changes subtly between countries, so the ability to instantly determine that kind of thing is needed to handle visits from unexpected guests. An international airport and a world-famous amusement park naturally gather people from different races, so they are decent training grounds for languages.”

“Unlike the amusement park in District 6, everyone is walking around restlessly in the airport. Not many people give off a welcoming aura. It’s important to know how to skillfully interrupt, have them stop, and speak with them while not making them feel uncomfortable.”

“Um… Do you do this too, Misaka?”

“None of my excursions have been this involved.”

Mikoto’s words of denial felt like a sort of salvation to Kamijou.

After all, he was the only one who only knew his native language. And yet he was obviously the oldest one! He had felt the common knowledge below his feet warping as he grew uneasy and wondered, “Wait… Am I the wrong one here?”

And then Mikoto said something else as if it was completely normal.

“It was a lot easier at my school. Everyone drew a card with a foreign language written on it and we had to speak that language for the rest of the day. I would have to speak English while listening to French, so it was some nice mental exercise. And all the voices around me were speaking in different languages.”

Kamijou Touma thought silently.

He decided giving up was not something to be ashamed of.

“That does not sound like something middle schoolers should be doing. I do think it’s a problem that I only know Japanese, though.”

“Wait a second. Then how did you get to Baggage City in Eastern Europe?”

A lot had happened in the world.

Whether in France during riots, England during a coup d’état, or the snowy plains of Russia during the intense battles of World War III, Kamijou Touma’s rare skill allowed him to charge through with nothing but Japanese. He was on the same level as an old woman who spoke the Kansai dialect.

“How have things been since then? You don’t seem to be suffering from any odd aftereffects.”

“No. My heart was stopped, but it didn’t leave any kind of arrhythmia. Oh, and I’m email friends with that mixed martial artist. That ninja disappeared somewhere, so I don’t know about her. But she wasn’t the type to die easily.”

“?”

Kamijou frowned.

He did not fully understand the circumstances surrounding Baggage City.

“I’m still not satisfied with what happened to my teacher…to Kihara Kagun. I was sure he had completely died back then, but then that eyepatch girl arrived. She did something to him and he stood back up. But unlike us, it didn’t look like his stopped heart had started again. Anyone would have said he was dead.”

“Kihara Kagun…”

Kamijou did not know much about him either.

He only knew he was one of the people he had not saved at Baggage City.

And due to what he had left behind, he had indirectly given Kamijou the first step toward rescuing Fräulein Kreutune.

He had left behind several backdoors while working as a researcher in Academy City, he had fled from the city, and he had been closely related to the Lightning God Thor of Gremlin. That put him in at least as rare a position as Tsuchimikado Motoharu. And that was the very least. It was possible he had lived somewhere even deeper. That was a world Kamijou could not even imagine. He actually felt guilty for casually wanting to know more.

"Who was that eyepatch girl?" asked Kumokawa Maria. "While in Baggage City I saw those people who were not from Academy City, but she did not simply seem the same as them. The sword that brown girl had wasn't normal either, but *I could not even comprehend the fear I had for that eyepatch girl.* What kind of creature is that girl who took away my teacher? Where does someone like that stand?"

She was a magic god.

She was Othinus.

And Kamijou himself had experienced a portion of her power in Baggage City. It had not simply been a case of being able to do nothing. It had not simply been a case of being defeated the instant the battle began. She was in a completely different dimension.

He was left wondering when the battle had even started.

And without even knowing that, a decisive final line had been crossed. As if it had been left behind by something, a hopeless sense of defeat had arrived a moment later. That strange feeling was all there was. Even after his defeat, he was left with nothing but mysteries and questions.

Kamijou had suffered defeat at the hands of a few different monsters in the past, but none of those defeats had been that overwhelming. He had not been told the rules, what the stage was, or what the time limit was. The next thing he had known, it was already over.

That was the kind of competition it was.

What kind of creature was a magic god? In what world did a magic god stand? It was as if he had been told someone who did not know those fundamental facts could not even take part in the fight.

If Kamijou Touma was thrown in front of Othinus once more, what could he do? He was not sure he could do anything. He could find no factor that made him think he could manage with his right hand that could negate anything.

However…

“We will know before long.”

“?”

“We will know. I don’t know how dangerous a monster she is, but we will finish this. And once that happens, you might be able to meet Kihara Kagun once more.”

“You mean-…?”

Kumokawa Maria began to ask a further question.

But then Birdway’s cell phone rang. That elegant magic cabal boss did not hold her phone in one hand and move to an abandoned area. She raised her index finger to silence everyone there and boldly answered the phone amid them all.

“Okay, got it.”

It was a short conversation.

The next thing she said was addressing those around her rather than the phone.

“It’s time. We finally have our cue.”

Part 7

A certain simple cabin was made from a number of logs.

However, not even a single breeze was allowed within that space and the kind heat from the fireplace evenly filled the air. A space was not defined by the monetary value of the furniture and other items within it. It would contain what the person who arranged it saw value in. That obvious fact was driven into this room with tremendous force.

The softness of a sunbeam coming in through the window seemed far more elegant than a gaudy furnishing made of pure gold.

One room contained a few chairs and a wooden table that looked like a cross between a piece of furniture and a camping supply. Sitting at the table was a blond woman wearing a thick work jacket, thick work pants, and a work apron. On her blond head, she wore large goggles meant to protect factory workers’ eyes.

Her name was Silvia.

She was one of the fewer than twenty Saints in the world. She was also one of the most skilled of the royal maids that looked after and protected the British Royal Family. Everything she wore was unrefined and would only bring the word “austere” to mind, but the way Silvia wore them, they somehow produced the silhouette of a delicate maid. This was due to her occupation and her natural disposition.

Another woman spoke to her.

The woman speaking to Silvia was named Brunhild Eiktobel.

“You could pretty much call this the last supper, so why is the table covered in sandwiches? I would also like to ask about the simple water filling this glass.”

“When in a country and region where you can drink water fresh from a spring, it is sacrilege to boil it and steep tea in it. In fact, most of the world sees delicious water as a luxury. This is similar to how the truly top-class fish is only eaten by fishermen. I won’t insist you tell the difference in taste, but at least give it some thought before complaining.”

“I find it difficult to be thankful for something with no flavor.”

“So if I filled your glass with salt, would you give it perfect marks?”

Brunhild was a Saint as well, but she also had the unique characteristics of a Valkyrie which drew out special Norse power. However, the two powers did not work well together, so they would alternately strengthen and weaken on a fixed cycle like the waxing and waning of the moon. During the worst time, the powers cancelled each other out, leaving her no different from a normal human.

She had long, wavy blonde hair and she wore a dress with denim pants worn under the short skirt. Over that, she wore a bulletproof jacket, supporters to protect her knees and elbows, and a feathered hat. Altogether, her outfit used modern materials to produce the silhouette of a legendary warrior maiden.

The joints of the chair held together by nails creaked under Brunhild’s weight.

“Have you received word yet?”

“I already passed the message along.”

“Then we do not need to wait around any longer.”

“Yes, it’s about time we began the destruction.”

After that short exchange, Silvia took a single sip of the chilled water in her glass.

Brunhild grabbed two or three of the sandwiches containing various contents, lifted them up as if crushing them in her grip, and put them all in her mouth at once.

She then asked, “May I ask a question?”

“You’re surprisingly talkative. I thought you would be more silent and harder to deal with.”

“Are the picture books scattered across the table part of standard British hospitality?” she asked while licking her thumb.

Among the books on the table were Peter Pan, the Golden Axe, and Snow White. The collection had no obvious connection such as all being from Grimm, Andersen, or Aesop. The only possible connection was that they all contained fairies or characters that could be interpreted as being fairies. They were likely meant for children as they were thin books with few pages, but the parchment used for the covers exuded a kind of tension that made even Brunhild hesitant to touch them. It may have been similar to how a stuffed bear was cute, but seeing one floating in a ditch filled with rushing water made one think something terrible had happened.

“They are a trump card,” spat out Silvia casually. “A trump card against the magic god.”

“I see.”

Brunhild did not press further.

She had not known them for long, but when Silvia and “those not currently there” said they had an idea, it was difficult for a normal person to understand yet tended to be constructed so as to always achieve results. There was no need to ask for details to understand it.

“The preparations are complete and the time has come. Is there any reason to stay here any longer?” asked Brunhild instead.

“No.”

And with that, the two women stood up from their chairs.

The mass of metal Brunhild called a sword was lying on the ground, so she kicked it up and caught it in one hand. Silvia gathered what looked like a bundle of laundry rope in both hands.

They opened the door of that simple log cabin.

The wind roared as it blew in.

They abandoned that log cabin more easily than a cheap tent as they headed for the battlefield.

Part 8

The North Sea could most simply be described as the ocean between England and Norway. It was near the Arctic, so no one would want to throw themselves into that dark nighttime ocean during November. This was one of the places one could call the “garden” of the Vikings who had once conquered the Arctic by ship. For that reason, there could easily be a pile of documents in the ruins of ships that contained the Norse knowledge that had been lost in the storm of Christian conversion.

Sargasso.

There were said to be tens or even hundreds of them throughout the world, but the exact number was not known. Here was one of those twisted islands that could be said to be both manmade and natural.

A large number of military rubber boats approached it.

The main members of the group were Second Princess Carissa, William Orwell the mercenary, and Knight Leader. This was an allied anti-Gremlin force mostly made up of British forces.

Carissa wore a showy red dress and she brought an unrefined radio up to her mouth as the quickly moving boat rocked beneath her.

“Gentlemen, it looks like America and Russia will be a little late. They will enter as the second wave of the attack just as I explained before. You know what we must do, right?”

“We must take all glory for ourselves before they arrive.”

“Good. This pile of trash isn’t on any map, so let’s blow it away to make reality match!!”

While the North Sea was a former “garden” of the Vikings, it had another important role as well.

It was a large-scale offshore oil field.

The towering shadows of cranes could be seen here and there in the white fog covering the ocean. Red lights blinked at fixed intervals at the ends of those cranes.

England owned half of the offshore oil platforms in the North Sea.

Carissa and the others had used the heliport on one of those oil platforms to arrive by air and then continued toward Sargasso by boat.

William Orwell spoke from within the same boat.

“When will that right arm boy get here?”

“He should make it in time for the second wave. Academy City’s supersonic planes can travel around the world in just a few hours. He might even arrive before the normal forces from America and Russia.”

Many mysteries still remained concerning Magic God Othinus, so that boy’s rule-breaking right arm was needed to destroy the equipment used to produce the lance. However, he was not needed for anything else. They could raze Sargasso and then have that right arm boy dropped from the supersonic plane like a bomb.

Several dozen military boats travelled through the cold ocean water while almost skipping along the surface.

Something like a giant mountain became visible through the white fog.

At the same time, they all heard the low noise of something tearing through the air above their heads.

Carissa spoke into her radio.

“Don’t hit the oil platforms.”

Immediately afterwards, several aerial bombs were let loose at an altitude of ten thousand meters. They mercilessly exploded above Sargasso.

These were known as fuel-air bombs.

A special combustible substance packed in a metal case was chemically made to expand, turned into an aerosol, scattered over an effective range of several hundred meters, and ignited. This allowed the weapon to cover a broad area in flames and explosive pressure. It was classified as a normal weapon that did not use nuclear technology, but it was rumored to have the destructive power to produce a mushroom cloud if used on a large enough scale.

In this case, a parent metal case produced several dozen child cases, each child case produced several dozen grandchild cases, and those finally scattered and detonated great amounts of the combustible material at just several dozen meters above the surface.

The darkness of the night was blown away.

A flood of light, heat, and noise filled that small world.

And it did not end after that single bomb.

There were five, six, seven… By the end, thirteen such bombs had been dropped on that same location.

Even if a mushroom cloud had been produced, no one would have been able to see it. The explosions swallowed up the other explosions and that worthless scenery spread as far as the eye could see.

“Silver Bullet A here. Every grape jelly we dropped hit. We will begin dropping the Mont Blancs.”

“Good. We will move in close while you do so.”

“Remember to check for toxic gas when you land. It is possible the high temperatures caused a chemical reaction in the ruins of those ships.”

A few more explosions occurred.

This time, the blast was used to drive thousands or even tens of thousands of sharp metal stakes downwards. That was why the weapon’s nickname was a chestnut dessert.

“Your methods never change,” said William without moving his eyebrows in the slightest. “The incident you caused in England is well known around the world. Gremlin may have analyzed your methods.”

“If you remove all the waste and search for the optimal usage of your weapons, everyone will ultimately arrive at the same place. What a military run by a nation needs is an attack method that is impossible to avoid even if you know it’s coming.”

As that downpour of deadly weapons fell on Sargasso, the group of military boats continued toward it. Carissa was not optimistic enough to think that bombing was enough to kill all the members of Gremlin. But whether they were a magician or a magic god, they still had the physical body of a human. They would have to use a good amount of their magical power on defense to push back that storm.

Carissa and the others would attack Gremlin’s flank while they were wholly focused on defending from the front.

That way, they could exterminate Gremlin before they could use their many strange spells.

The young British soldier operating the boat’s engine gave a report to Carissa.

“No toxic substances were detected. We do not need masks!”

“Good. Let’s accept the invitation to this home party. Ladies and gentlemen, let’s remain sensible, mind our manners, put on a gentle smile, and use plenty of flowery speech while we eat all the food prepared on the table!!”

Even as their boats approached the coast, they did not slow down.

They crashed up onto Sargasso all at once like a large killer whale hunting seals on the beach.

Everything was dyed black.

No toxic gas had been detected, but Carissa’s shapely nose detected the stench of melted plastic.

“Oh?”

She heard a voice.

It was an elderly voice.

Carissa and the others looked up toward a tanker sticking up diagonally across Sargasso. On the front of the tanker stood an old soldier holding a cane and wearing a silk hat and tailcoat.

He looked like an illusionist or a stage performer.

That impression was emphasized by the complete lack of hostility or malice he gave off even as he faced those who meant to kill him.

However, that did not mean he was not a threat.

It was the exact opposite. Someone with no hostility and someone able to completely hide their hostility appeared the same on the outside, but were completely different on the inside.

“I did not think this island was on any map. Did you ask the local fishermen perhaps? You certainly have grown soft if you are willing to entrust your life to the rumors spreading through the city.”

He spoke politely enough, but he had a mocking smile on his lips.

Carissa ignored his light comment.

The second princess spoke quietly with the head of the knights and the top mercenary on either side of her.

“Who is he?”

“You may call me Loki. Lady Othinus gave me the task of protecting this place with my-…”

To repeat: Carissa ignored the old man. She ignored him from beginning to end.

A flying blade similar to a giant arrowhead stabbed directly into the center of the old man’s neck and pierced through.

This happened an instant after the second princess raised a hand.

Robin Hood.

This was an Anglican spiritual item. It was a magical arrow accurately guided by the knights’ spell. It dealt enough damage to take Loki’s life in a single blow. The spells of the knights who protected an entire nation had evolved in a different direction from the average magicians who aimed to stand at the top as individuals. On the assumption that an excellent statesman would manage its use, all ideologies were stripped away. Their techniques were simply made to be powerful, to be easy to use, and to assuredly kill their enemy.

They would not know how heir enemy planned to evade or defend, but they would attack head on to crush that enemy’s armor and smash their shield. They would not hesitate to stab their blades into the soft flesh beyond.

And…

They would take that enemy’s life.

“Gh…bh?”

Loki tried to say something, but Carissa continued to ignore him.

She spoke to the men behind her rather than to her enemy.

“Continue on and eliminate everything that moves.”

The fully armed and armored knights moved in an organized manner throughout Sargasso. The old man fell from the tip of the tanker sticking up diagonally and slammed into the ground, but no one bothered to watch.

And then…

Carissa, Knight Leader, and William began walking past Loki who was just a corpse on the battlefield.

But they heard a small noise.

It sounded like the clattering of a window during a stormy night.

The noise continued and refused to stop.

“Cough cough cough cough cough… Well done, second princess of the country of knights. I cannot assess your performance any other way.”

The stench of rusty iron quickly spread out.

As he lay on the ground, Loki tried to forcefully pull out the Robin Hood projectile that had pierced through both his windpipe and his spine. It was a rough action that did not look like an attempt to heal himself or prolong his life. Instead, it looked like he was removing it so he could speak more easily.

Carissa did not look down.

She faced forward and spoke to the old man for the first time.

“Do you want to suffer as you die?”

“Loki spreads chaos through both the gods and their enemies to guide the entire world toward the final battle. He is a character who could be called the source of malice.”

The old man smiled despite having received a wound so fatal that it was hard to tell if his voice was coming from his mouth or the dark red hole in his throat.

“But at the same time, Loki is not an all-powerful lord of evil. Even in the legends, he is captured and harshly scolded by the gods whenever he spreads chaos. Sometimes he cries, sometimes he fails, and ultimately he is bound to a giant stone and eternally tortured until the beginning of world’s end. …In other words, the trend of the situation has no bearing on my strength or weakness. It has no bearing on my victory or defeat.”

They heard a noise.

It sounded like countless insects flying around by their ears.

“Wait. Don’t tell me…”

“*My victory was assured from the moment you set foot here.*”

The noise grew.

And grew.

And grew.

“As the bearer of the name Loki, it is my style to deceive both my enemies and my allies. Lady Othinus said it was unnecessary, but I still maliciously doubted every single member of Gremlin! I gave thorough thought to what a supposed traitor would need to determine the location of the true Sargasso. The answer I arrived at was the signs in the sky such as the stars, the moon, and the sun. So what if I had a spell that could encase all of Sargasso in a dome and display false stars like a planetarium? And with enough precision to fool both this enemy and my allies! What if I took such a selfish action that could even affect my allies’ ceremonies!?”

As the sound of wings grew ever louder, the old man’s body began to disappear.

And it finally vanished altogether.

It dissolved into the fog as if nothing had ever been there at all.

Only his voice remained.

“The Territory of Víðópnir may have cracked my bonds with my comrades, but it has proven my theory correct and given me certain victory!! I even altered Marian’s memo pad! Now, you sublime supervisors of war who have challenged Gremlin head on, be struck down by the malice of someone as lowly as I!!”

All that remained at Carissa’s feet was a bloody doll the size of a human palm that appeared to have been cut from a large wooden board.

Carissa stepped on the Robin Hood stabbing into its neck to completely destroy the wooden board.

At the same time, a magical transmission arrived from the knights.

“I have a report. Teams A through F have found no trace of the magic god or the production of the lance. I repeat: we have found no trace of them! This Sargasso is completely empty!!”

“So we picked the wrong target. All men, do not even think about escape. We don’t have time!! Focus all your power on defense, so you can outlast the-...!!”

Before she finished speaking, something else happened.

Sargasso was swallowed up by an explosion and disappeared from the planet.

Part 9

"What…?"

The presidential aide Roseline Krackhart frowned within one room of New York's UN headquarters building. She glanced over at Queen Regnant Elizard without thinking.

♦

"What do you mean?"

The nun Orsola Aquinas was providing support with information organization and analysis in London's national library. When she received the report, she exchanged a glance with Sherry Cromwell, the brown magician who specialized in using a golem.

♦

"Wait…"

In Academy City's District 23 international airport, Leivinia Birdway initially thought she had misheard. But the subordinate she was speaking with over the phone, Mark Space, repeated the exact same words.

"We received a second report. The spy noticed a trap set by the enemy and corrected the information. The real Sargasso that Gremlin is using as their headquarters is located…"

The background noise was loud.

A violent impulse rose within Birdway's chest that made her want to fry every single thing that could produce noise.

But that was nothing more than her impatience and tension rising to the surface.

Her subordinate continued speaking.

"…in Japan. It is almost in the very center of Tokyo Bay!! They are already on the move!!"

Part 10

"This is no joke," muttered Birdway as if spitting out the words. Her voice quickly grew louder. "This is no joke, dammit!! It had nothing at all to do with the layout of the ley lines or the historical foundation of the location? Damn Gremlin!! Was freeing themselves of those locational conditions part of their preparations around the world!?"

“Hey, Birdway, what’s going on?”

Unsurprisingly, Kamijou and the others had not heard everything said to Birdway over the phone.

“The-…”

Just as Birdway started speaking, something else happened.

They felt a low rumbling in the earth.

Small objects floated down from the ceiling. They were pieces of various materials that had scraped off.

“What?” Kamijou looked up. “That was distant. It sounded like thunder, but…was that an explosion? To hear it this far away, how big was it?”

“This is no time to be worrying about that,” said Birdway quickly. “They placed their Sargasso base in Tokyo Bay near Academy City!! Academy City has given no official opinion on the destruction of Gremlin. They aren’t part of the international conference in New York! Units have been sent out to places all over the world in preparation, but the area around Academy City is the one place where the usual military balance won’t work. After all, this one city caused a world war! Gremlin is using that fact!!”

“Wait… Hold up…”

“From that commotion just now, I assume Gremlin has learned the investigation is over. And to deal with it, they’ve started an attack of their own! I don’t know if this is a preemptive strike out of fear of Academy City’s military might or if they’re targeting your right hand!!”

“Wait a second, Birdway!! Tokyo Bay? Gremlin’s in Tokyo Bay!? But that’s a terrible place for them to be… With Gremlin in the bay and Academy City to the west, the primary battlefield between the two of them will be…!!”

“That’s right.”

Even Birdway was showing some panic.

Even so, she spoke clearly.

“The battlefield today will be Japan’s capital of Tokyo. And it will be the 23 special wards at the heart of the city where most of the administrative agencies are!!”

Kamijou felt faint.

This was insane.

Gremlin had placed their base right next to Academy City. If they launched an all-out attack on Academy City, the city would not remain silent. They would do whatever they could to set up a defensive line in the center of Tokyo. If that happened, the two forces could end up mercilessly clashing throughout Tokyo. It would be Baggage City all over again. And this time, it would be in the capital of a nation, even if Academy City tended to overshadow it. Kamijou could not even guess how far the effects would spread if the city was paralyzed by a battle that made one want to cover one's eyes.

But this was no time to be standing around in shock.

No matter how they spent their time, the crisis would arrive just as soon.

Birdway struck Kamijou's back and shouted at him.

"We need to get to the supersonic passenger plane. Pass through the employee gate and get to the electronic cart!!"

"We're going to run away!? Even though we know blood is going to be shed here!?"

"The only way to stop this is sinking Gremlin with a swift attack before the two forces collide! And right now, the only way to stop the production of the lance is with your right hand! We need to get to Sargasso no matter what. We can jump out of the plane with a parachute if we need to!! You need to assume each decision you make here could lead to a capital city's…no, an entire nation's destruction!!"

"Dammit…"

He did not even have time to worry about Index, Mikoto, or the others.

He did not know how exactly Gremlin would attack. Depending on the route they chose, a large-scale battle could occur right next to the part of the city his parents had moved to.

"Where the hell is the employee gate!?"

He started running through the airport.

Even if they did not know what exactly was happening, a slight commotion had started running through the airport. The electronic displays were saying all flights had been cancelled due to an emergency. At first Kamijou thought a lot of foreign businessmen were rushing toward the airline reception counters, but it turned out that was not the only place people were headed. An announcement began cycling through different languages.

After a few loops, Kamijou finally heard the Japanese announcement as he ran.

“Please head to the special shelters. Halls A3, E4, F2, and H3 have underground shelters large enough for two thousand people each. For information on the situation, please check the displays throughout the airport or the official site. Please get to a shelter that has room left.”

District 23 had the city’s aerospace development facilities contained within it. In addition to the terrorist countermeasures common to all international airports, this one had airtight underground shelters in case rocket fuel containing toxic components leaked out.

However, this was the first time Kamijou had ever heard this announcement.

The announcement sounded gentle and calm at first, but that hinted that the situation was actually quite out of the ordinary.

(Damn. The atmosphere has grown tense.)

Kamijou grimaced as he ran in the opposite direction of the flow of people.

(Do I really have to smell this stench here? This dangerous stench!! Can wars really start this easily? I thought this was only supposed to happen when someone made a decisive mistake as they steered history!)

“Wait! Wait up, you!!”

He heard a loud voice.

He turned around while still running to see Misaka Mikoto behind him.

“Tokyo is going to be a battlefield? Like in Hawaii!? You have to be kidding. Please tell me you’re kidding!!”

“I don’t know what’s going on either!! But you can tell things are bad from the smell, right!?”

“My mama lives there! I need something more concrete than that!!”

Kamijou clenched his teeth.

And he spoke.

“Come with me! That’s better than just watching, right!?”

Index ran up behind him as well.

That white nun holding a calico cat looked indignant.

“Touma! Why aren’t you relying on a magic expert when you’re about to fight a group of magicians!?”

“…Fine!!”

He did not have time for these questions.

If it came down to it, he could have just him and Mikoto parachute down when they passed over Sargasso in the supersonic plane. This was not the time to get bogged down in an argument.

“Where’s the employee gate anyway!?”

“Did you just start running without thinking!?”

Part 11

Kumokawa Maria thought over the conversation she had heard just before the situation began to move.

(Gremlin.)

She felt overwhelmingly more fear toward that organization than she did hostility. She wanted to keep her run-ins with them to a minimum. After that one incident, she simply never wanted to see them again.

Bersi.

Kihara Kagun.

Kumokawa Maria understood that teacher of hers was already dead. She had accepted that. The problem was that the eyepatch-wearing girl who called herself Othinus was controlling Kihara Kagun’s supposedly dead body.

She would not have done so for no reason or with no need.

That eyepatch-wearing girl did not seem as violently emotional as the brown girl Kumokawa Maria had once met in Baggage City.

She would use someone because they were useful.

She would ensure she had something because she could use it in her plan.

In that case, why had she done that?

(His life should have ended there. No one would ever accept it, but that had to be the best end for him! Yet… Yet…!! She's using his empty shell to do something? That oppression could twist what kind of person he truly was!!)

She would take him back.

She had been unable to rescue the human named Kihara Kagun, but she could not let her teacher's honor be disgraced any further.

And so she set her sights on retrieving that teacher's body no matter how frightening an opponent it put her up against.

The thin thread she needed to do that lay before her eyes.

That thread was Kamijou Touma.

This meant she would cross paths with those monsters from Gremlin once more. It had been a miracle that she survived in Baggage City. It could be even worse this time. She might not come back alive.

(I will do this.)

But Kumokawa Maria could not stop.

(I will do this!! If I overlook this chance, I will live a life of regret, so I need to focus my entire life here. I will make sure I am decisively rejected and then give up! I will bring an end to everything related to him!!)

Part 12

They could not even spare the time for a detailed explanation.

Kamijou and the others jumped over the employee gate like it was a hurdle and ran down the narrow passageway while ignoring the cries of the airport employees. They threw open an oddly thick stainless steel door and jumped into the electronic cart waiting there.

Birdway and Lessar must have used a shorter route because they were already aboard.

But something else happened before the cart could move toward the supersonic passenger plane on the runway.

"Wait!!"

It was Kumokawa Maria.

Instead of using the cart's door, she practically climbed in through the window to force herself inside.

"I'm going, too. I've already made up my mind, so you can't talk me out of it!! I'll do anything, so please take me with you to where Gremlin is!!"

"Gnyaaah!? She managed to casually climb on the lap of my target, Kamijou Touma. Such exquisite negotiation skills. And she's also a maid that managed to slip in the fact that she will do 'anything'!? I-I may have been mistaken about who my greatest rival is!!"

Lessar raised her voice in confusion, but Kumokawa Maria did not seem to be listening.

"From what I heard, it seems Gremlin's base is in Tokyo Bay. In that case, I don't need my passport. Adding on a last-minute passenger shouldn't be a problem!!"

"N-no, wait! There's still the hurdle of leaving Academy City without permission!"

"All of you are slipping past that restriction, so that means there's a loophole here, right?"

"We don't have time to argue," cut in Birdway. "We can easily take someone with a death wish to the battlefield. What matters right now is getting Kamijou Touma out of Academy City! If Gremlin's primary objective is Imagine Breaker rather than Academy City, then we can draw their aim away. That might prevent the two forces from entering into direct conflict!!"

Birdway tapped on the driver's seat headrest and the driver set off. The electronic cart produced no engine noise and moved surprisingly smoothly toward the unique silhouette of a supersonic passenger plane.

It was a civilian craft that used bomber technology.

And since it would now be carrying what firepower they had (i.e. Kamijou Touma), its role was not much different.

"It looks like the engine has already been warmed up. Get on! We'll take off in five minutes!!"

Urged on by Birdway, Kamijou and the others climbed up the stairs and into the plane. The plane lurched before they had even sat in their seats properly, much less fastened their seatbelts. That would have been bad enough in a normal airplane, but this supersonic plane could fly at 7,000 kph. They could easily be freed from the bonds of gravity while in a narrow tunnel-like space.

"Sorry about asking you to do this," said Kumokawa Maria just before they took off. "But I just couldn't let go of this last connection to my old teacher. This might be the point where my life switches over to another set of rails. So...!!"

“It’s fine.”

Kamijou did not know the details of the situation.

But he did not think that was a major issue.

It was rare for someone to truly understand the situation another person was in.

She wanted to accomplish something for the sake of someone else. Kamijou had met several people with similar feelings hidden within them. Kumokawa Maria had the same light in her eyes.

“I’ve lived my life so far by doing the same thing. It’s nothing admirable, though. The place you think you are is not as much of a dead end as you think it is.”

“Y-your panties are striped yellow and black, too!! You’re too shocking! Your seat is over here!!”

Lessar dragged Kumokawa Maria away, but they truly took off before she managed to sit down.

Kamijou frantically spoke up because he was familiar with the world of 7,000 kph.

“H-hey! Hurry up and fasten your seatbelts! Just grabbing on with your hands isn’t enough!”

“You’re still focusing on that bee girl!? Are you trying to turn me into a jealousy character!?”

Hearing that, Mikoto covered her face with one hand.

“Bee girl? That reminds me of her.[1] No, I can’t have her showing up here…”

The sense of acceleration pressing against their gut grew.

The supersonic passenger plane left the international airport’s runway and glided nicely up into the air. By the time Kamijou looked at the scenery outside the window, thinking they would be outside Academy City soon, the cityscape below had already greatly changed.

They were no longer in Academy City.

He was seeing the scenery of Shinjuku or somewhere similar.

[1] The “hou” of “Shokuhou Misaki” means “bee”.

At this rate, he thought they might arrive at the Sargasso on Tokyo Bay before reaching 7,000 kph.

But he was being naïve.

With a great roar, some kind of giant monster flew alongside the plane outside the window.

"……Wha-?"

He did not have time to voice his question or give a warning.

The creature was the size of the passenger plane and it looked like a lizard with bat wings added on. Its entire silhouette appeared to be formed from massive amounts of red thread.

However, one would never find this creature in an animal encyclopedia.

In picture books, it may have been called a dragon.

A giant eyeball with a vertical, snake-like pupil rolled in the creature's head and looked at Kamijou Touma through the window.

It did not breathe fire.

Instead, it gave a large flap of its giant wings.

In an instant, that crystallization of cutting-edge technology was mercilessly sliced in half.

Kamijou Touma, Index, Misaka Mikoto, Leivinia Birdway, Lessar, Kumokawa Maria, the calico cat Sphinx, and the pilot were all mercilessly thrown out into empty air.

The plane may not have made it to its proper altitude yet, but they were still three hundred meters up.

And they fell toward the center of Tokyo.

Between the Lines 2

The power of Academy City's #2 Level 5 was known as Dark Matter.

No matter where the essence of that power or the primary personality ruling it may have been at the moment, "he" was undoubtedly the one who had first brought that #2 power into the world.

His name was Kakine Teitoku.

He was currently known as an empty husk because he was nothing but a collection of a few organs including his brain.

“Bhah!!”

Those few organs began unnaturally wriggling like a worm as if an invisible hand had grabbed a bag filled with water. A pure white and sticky substance gathered around those organs. Details began to form and pale color appeared on the surface. In the blink of an eye, it transformed into something that could not be distinguished from a beautiful human boy.

“Ghahhh… Cough cough! Cough!!”

The sea breeze stung at his nose.

The merciless chilly air stabbed at his exposed skin.

He was lying atop a strange land made up of the ruins of countless boats. He realized he had several cables attached to his body here and there. He had seen something similar before. That was back when the dark side of Academy City had hooked him up to a life support device and had him do nothing but produce Dark Matter as a material for weapons. The equipment around him now was junk compared to back then, but he thought it was praiseworthy to catch up to Academy City using nothing but junk.

He heard a female voice coming from somewhere.

“It looks like he’s conscious.”

A gloomy male voice answered.

“That does not matter. I only need to have him produce what we need.”

It seemed they were indeed after his Dark Matter as material for a weapon. The reason him being conscious “did not matter” may have been because the man thought he could eternally control and restrain his physical body by sending special electrical signals into his brain.

That was not entirely wrong.

Or at least, it was not wrong when talking about the Kakine Teitoku who had sunk into the depths of Academy City’s dark side.

“A new age has arrived.”

He slowly moved his lips.

This must have been an unexpected reaction. He could clearly tell focus had turned to him. He heard the sound of some kind of meter being operated, but no change came over him. His smile did not vanish.

“The old age is long over. I don’t know who you are or what you’re after, but your fate is clear now that the age has left you behind. How sad. If you had tried this exact same thing just a few weeks ago, you might have gained everything you wished without issue. I really do feel sorry for you.”

The sounds of narrow tubes breaking from the inside could be heard.

The Dark Matter ate into the objects around him as if flowing back through the electrodes and cables meant to control the device known as Kakine Teitoku. All color turned to white and the electronic devices at the other end of the cables were swallowed up in an instant.

“Ha ha ha!! Ogaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!”

It seemed they had set up a parallel processor by constructing a giant system out of hundreds of computers, but it did not matter. It was too late. He spread out through each and every one of the cables set up like a spider web. He devoured all of the computers, all of the power sources allowing those computers to run, and everything else they were connected to. He bit into them, swallowed them, digested them, and turned them all into a part of him.

“I don’t care who you are. It doesn’t matter what you’ve built up. I’m not interested in what you’ll give to the world. Good and evil? Kindness and malice? Gain and loss? Positive and negative? We can let historians decide that a hundred years from now. All I know is what fate you deserve for trying to use me as a tool!!”

A horrible noise continued as if he were breaking every last bone in his body from within.

Pure white wings extended from his back. They spread out like plants growing in fast forward. They were not merely a few dozen meters long or a few hundred meters long. In an instant, those wings enveloped that giant pile of ruined ships that could be mistaken for an island.

They formed a dome around it.

They formed a cage of slaughter.

“Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!! Ah ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha

During the Cold War in which both sides had thrust thousands of nuclear missiles before their enemy as a threat, the most feared thing had been an uncontrollable chaos. That nightmare was blooming here.

And an instant before that chaos arrived…

An eyepatch-wearing girl unhesitatingly grabbed Kakine Teitoku's neck in one hand.

Not even a subtle change could be seen on her face.

Even with that horrifying result before her, her entire body appeared perfectly relaxed.

"Bh…gh…?"

For a while, he did not understand why there were groans coming from his mouth.

The eyepatch-wearing girl had grabbed Kakine Teitoku's neck with a single hand and lifted him up. No, she was not just grabbing his neck. Her fingers were digging into it. Those fingertips sank deeply into that body made of Dark Matter. She used pure strength. Her fingertips had dug in deep enough to reach his spine, but she increased that strength a bit further and those fingertips sank even deeper. The sensation of that hard bone being crushed was followed by indescribable pain filling his entire body.

It only took a single attack.

The dome-shaped cage of slaughter covering the entirety of Sargasso shattered and floated down like snow.

"Gh…gbh!? Gagugh!!"

"I see everything is on schedule."

"This is the scientific material needed to fill the gap magic left in the construction of the lance. Any pure specimen tough enough to withstand the development into a holistic esper can be used, so Fräulein Kreutune specifically is not needed. We do not need any combat ability from the device that produces the material."

The eyepatch-wearing girl and the gloomy man exchanged a few short words.

All the while, a cracking sound could be heard as the girl poured tremendous strength into Kakine Teitoku's neck.

"Listen, you piece of scrap. I only expect one thing from you. Just one." The eyepatch-wearing girl spoke slowly to him. "Be of use to me. …If you can't, I'll carefully remake everything about you until you can and do. It will be like holding a girl's head down and beating her face into something completely unrecognizable with your fist."

“Ah… Uh…”

The sounds of breath escaping had no connection to Kakine Teitoku’s will.

The girl dug her fingertips inside his spine and disturbed what lay within. That stimulus caused his body to involuntarily convulse. He was like a ventriloquist doll made of living flesh.

“Where’s you answer? Say ‘as you wish’.”

“…Azzzz…yuuu…wISh…!!!???”

“Good boy.”

And with that, a dull sound exploded out.

This was nothing as simple as breaking his neck.

It was unclear what force was acting on him, but the object that made up Kakine Teitoku’s human form was compressed from all directions and transformed into a mass the size of a volley ball.

A distorted pattern could be seen on the surface similar to when transparent glass was forced against someone’s face or someone wore a stocking over their head.

The eyepatch-wearing girl grabbed the ball in one hand and tossed it to the gloomy man.

“Do what needs to be done. You should be able to finish this before the same happens to you.”

“Understood.”

Suddenly, a deep noise similar to a dinosaur’s roar burst out overhead.

The vibration of the air filled Sargasso and a few of the ruined boats rolled down the pile. The girl looked unconcernedly up into the white steam-filled sky.

“Mökkurkalfe and Níðhöggr. So their turn has finally come. It took you a while to find this one little base,” spat out the girl.

However, she showed no interest in the enemies surely making their way toward her.

She was speaking only to what lay within herself.

“The production of the spear is in its final stages. Bring in Marian Slingeneyer. Have her finish the work with the skills of a Dvergr.”

CHAPTER 3

Doubt at the Edge of Decision.

Turning_Point.

Part 1

In truth, Kamijou and the others had been wearing lightweight parachutes before the plane took off. Unlike normal parachutes, these ones had no secondary chute and no safety feature to automatically open based on an altimeter. These alterations shaved away at their life-saving features, but allowed the packed parachute to be as small as a thin school bag.

However…

A parachute could not be used under certain circumstances such as extreme wind.

And did you know one of those conditions was being below a certain altitude?

The parachute would not be able to provide enough deceleration, so the wearer would slam into the ground.

“Shit!!”

His vision spun around and around until he had no idea which way was up. He could only feel a strange fear inside his gut. He had been dropped from three hundred meters up, so he could not avoid an instant death if he struck the ground. He frantically reached behind him and tried to pull the string, but he could not get a good grip on the thin string being blown around by the air.

It took three to five seconds.

He tried not to think about how far he had approached the ground in that time. He squeezed his eyes shut, grabbed the string, and pulled as hard as he could.

The bag on his back exploded open.

An intense burden was placed on the shoulder straps, but something was wrong. Kamijou had never thought a parachute could reproduce the phenomenon of a dwarf slowly travelling through the sky with a large umbrella seen in picture books, but he was falling much faster than he had expected. The deceleration was insufficient. He was still falling rather than descending.

(You're kidding me… It didn't open properly!? Did it get tangled up!?)

He looked up to see the fabric of the parachute had not formed a proper circle. It had formed an odd shape similar to a half-moon with pleats.

A parachute could not open and function properly in every position.

Forcing it open while spinning through the air had increased the risk of it not functioning properly.

His altitude was also insufficient.

Even if he had used the parachute properly, the landing would have provided enough of an impact to break a bone if he got his footing wrong.

It was blatantly obvious what would happen if he slammed into the asphalt now.

To put it simply: instant death.

(If I fall…I'll die!!)

Kamijou flailed his limbs around despite knowing it was hopeless.

And then his body stopped as if it had caught on something. The impact knocked the breath out of him. After a short delay, he realized he was swaying back and forth like a clock's pendulum.

"What…?"

He looked up and saw something sticking out in a straight line. It looked like an improvised rope forcibly made out of a curtain or something similar. At the end, he could see it was tangled around a silhouette resembling a giant fishing rod made of steel.

(A crane… Is this a high-rise building under construction?)

A quick glance told him he was over thirty stories up.

He was over two hundred meters from the asphalt surface.

The building was incomplete, so this was not the roof. The crane was made to have its height extended after the exterior of each floor was completed.

As Kamijou dangled down, the highest floor was approximately seven meters below his feet. That was no different from jumping off the roof a two-story house. However, the crane must have been in the middle of lifting steel beams up from the ground because it was protruding out from the building. If Kamijou let go of his parachute bag, he would not even graze the building as he fell to the surface.

Kamijou heard the disturbing sound of snapping fibers from overhead.

If a parachute was blown away from its landing point, it could enter a forest. If it got caught in a thick tree and left the wearer hanging for long periods of time, it could cause serious enough damage to crush the artery under the armpit.

What if that risk had been eliminated by having the silk fabric woven such that the parachute was strong to the even force of catching the air but weak to more narrow impacts? What if it was made to quickly break when it was caught in a tree?

(Not good.)

Kamijou immediately grabbed at the wire holding him up.

The sound of the fabric tearing grew louder.

(Not good!! If the parachute caught on the crane tears, I'll fall straight for the asphalt! I need to climb up to the crane before that happens!!)

However, this was not as easy as Kamijou imagined it would be.

He was dangling from the bottom of the wire which was attached to his back, so he had to climb up while supporting his entire bodyweight with his arms.

In movies and documentaries, special forces were often seen quickly climbing up or down a wire hanging from a sheer cliff or a hovering helicopter, but that was because they distributed the weight bearing down on their grip by having their legs grabbing onto the wire as well as their hands.

Trying to crawl using only one's arms shows how surprisingly difficult it is to move forward. This was the same but with the bonds of gravity at their greatest due to advancing vertically.

It was near impossible for anyone but a competitive weightlifter.

Before he even made it three meters up, an unpleasant pain started coming from the insides of Kamijou's upper arms. He had pushed his muscles past their limit and they had raised the white flag.

"You're…kidding…"

The ripping of the complexly tangled parachute's fabric was now visible.

Once it completely tore, there would be nothing he could do.

His all-negating right hand gave him no way of safely landing from that hellish free fall.

(Am I going to die this easily? I don't even know what's going on and haven't even seen the person attacking. Can this really happen!?)

Suddenly, he heard a sound similar to roaring wind.

But this was not the common sound of wind blowing between high-rise buildings.

It was not even wind.

It was a giant form.

It was that dragon-like flying monster that had flown alongside the supersonic passenger plane and cut it in two.

It circled through the sky and charged directly toward where Kamijou dangled as if destroying its previous steel prey had not been enough.

"…Oh!?"

He did not even have time to complain about the cruelty of the world.

The steel crane Kamijou hung from was completely smashed and flew through the air.

He could not even hear the sound of the impact.

The scenery transformed into distorted flowing lines. He could tell he was being swung around like a morning star. He felt an unpleasant chill as if his heart had shot up from his feet. Even as his vision was thrown into disarray, Kamijou was just barely able to tell he had been thrown further away from the building and toward a road wide enough to land a small Cessna on.

And then he grasped the situation.

(The crane broke and is falling toward the road!?)

A snapping sound cut off Kamijou's thoughts.

The parachute fabric binding him to the crane had finally reached its limit.

As if he had slipped out, Kamijou's body was thrown from the remains of the crane as they rotated and fell. It was like fixing a stone to the end of a stick with double-sided tape and then swinging the stick around as hard as one could.

Even so, Kamijou did not reach the top floor of the partially-constructed building.

He was mercilessly tossed into a floor partway down which had not yet had glass added to the windows.

"Gaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!?"

His cry of pain was drowned out by the roar of the remains of the giant crane reaching the ground.

Unable to withstand the pain, Kamijou curled up in the fetal position. He rolled around and continued screaming. He was not simply trying to distract himself from the pain. He was doing it without realizing it, but he was screaming in order to release the limiters in his head and intentionally secrete certain substances in his brain. It was the same thing done in certain track and field events such as the hammer throw.

"U-uhh…"

Kamijou finally unsteadily rose to his feet on that floor with exposed concrete, exposed steel columns, and no interior whatsoever.

The monster from before shot by just outside the building, so Kamijou hurriedly hid behind a thick column.

But it did not try to attack.

That monster which was completely covered in red thread must have been satisfied with destroying the crane. It flapped its giant wings and flew off without checking on the damage it had done.

(Where's Index? And what about Misaka, Birdway, Lessar, and Kumokawa Maria!? What happened to them? Did they make it to the ground safely with their parachutes? They weren't attacked on the way down, were they!?)

He pulled out his cell phone and called Index's number. She tended not to answer her 0 yen phone, but he had no choice but to gather what information he could, one by one.

But…

"What?"

Index did not answer.

In fact, it did not even ring once.

Instead, a recorded female voice gave a looping announcement.

"The lines are currently extremely congested. To give priority to emergency services such as the police and firefighters, we ask that you refrain from making unnecessary calls or emails. To check on the safety of your family and friends, please use the cell phone companies' emergency voice message service."

Calls would not get through. Emails were out, too.

He could not display the simple message board for cell phones either. The screen displayed a communication error and froze up.

He tried routing around the issue with a wireless LAN app that used Wi-Fi, but it would not work either. He doubted all of the phone's services would work here because it was an Academy City phone, but this was too much.

For an instant, he wondered if the communications network had been intentionally knocked out, but he decided against it.

There was something else to suspect before resorting to conspiracy theories.

If the lines were overloaded, something must have happened to overload them.

"…"

Kamijou looked back toward the glass-less window.

He had rolled a good way along the floor, so he was over ten meters from the window. He could not check on the wide road down below from there. To check, he had to approach the window and peer down.

He realized he was feeling an intense aversion to doing that.

This was not a fear of heights. It was not a refusal to remind himself he was in a dangerous place. He was afraid the scenery down below would have transformed into something he could not even imagine.

But…

Whether he checked or not, the truth would not change.

And the sooner he gained that information, the more options he might have for his next action.

Kamijou slowly and unsteadily moved out from behind the steel pillar. He walked toward the glass-less window. He took one step, then another. Each time the soles of his shoes touched the ground, he felt the tension inside him grow. It was like playing Russian roulette and seeing the odds of the bullet rising bit by bit as each empty round went by.

He took the final step.

Kamijou stood on the edge of a steep cliff with nothing to grab on to.

With motions so stiff they seemed to make creaking noises, he lowered his gaze.

And he saw…

He saw…

He saw…

Part 2

Misaka Mikoto was thrown mercilessly from the supersonic passenger plane.

She calmly grabbed the string to her parachute, but she spotted a white form falling quickly toward the ground. It was Index who was holding a struggling calico cat. The parachute had no safety device to automatically release based on an altimeter. If she did not know how to use her parachute, she would literally plunge headfirst to the ground.

“Oh, honestly!!”

Mikoto stopped using her parachute and stretched out her arms and legs as if diving into a pool. With a sensation of accelerating toward the ground, she quickly approached Index who was chaotically rotating as she fell.

“Come here, you!!”

She reached out a hand and grabbed the white nun’s arm with her fingertips.

They were less than a hundred meters from the ground. Even if she opened her parachute now, it would be impossible to stop their combined weights before hitting the ground. They would slam into the asphalt with plenty of momentum to spare.

She gave up on that.

She switched over her focus and began controlling magnetism.

Mikoto felt bad about how much the cat in Index’s arms began to struggle, but she had more important things to worry about.

She bent her legs and pressed the bottoms of her feet against the wall of a giant train station building and slid down with tremendous force. She decelerated so quickly it was amazing orange sparks did not burst out. While detecting the stench of leather being burnt by friction, Misaka Mikoto finally killed their falling speed and came to a stop at four stories up.

Mikoto glanced around while supporting Index and the calico cat in one arm.

“Is this Shinjuku Station? I’ve only ever seen pictures online.”

More specifically, it was the east entrance. The familiar TV studio from a certain national midday TV show was there. Mikoto had imagined it was filled with non-Academy City fashion shops, but the signs for consumer electronics stores stood out more prominently. They could be seen all over the place.

But she did not even consider dropping to the ground and looking around from there.

There was a simple reason for this.

“What is all this?”

It looked like the tide going in and out on fast forward.

It looked like marching army ants.

The true identity of this strange sight was people. People young, old, male, and female filled the streets and plazas to the extent that Mikoto wondered why they were not in school or at work (even if the same applied to her).

They had not gathered from across the country for some event.

?
?

They had nowhere to stand. Mikoto could not tell what color the sidewalk was. No matter where she looked, she saw only heads, heads, and more heads. And this was not limited to the sidewalk. With no regard for the color of the traffic lights, the streets were filled with long lines of congested traffic and the gaps between cars were filled with large numbers of pedestrians. The sight seemed to twist one's sense of what was normal. The area was so packed that one began to wonder why no one was standing on the hoods or roofs of the cars.

"It's Gremlin." muttered Index as she hung down. "Gremlin did something."

That may have been the case.

However, they could not tell what exactly that was.

A giant shadow cut by over their heads. It was that fairy tale monster which had sliced apart the supersonic plane earlier. However, it only passed by in the sky. It gave no concentrated attack on Mikoto and Index and it did not indiscriminately destroy the buildings or people in the area.

Mikoto suddenly pictured the face of her mother, Misuzu, who lived in the city.

She used her powers to access her cell phone while holding Index in both hands, but received no response.

"All of the lines are overloaded. I can't connect to anything but the disaster message board. And it looks like there's no message there."

Just to be sure, she set it to record the message on her phone if one came in. She then released her control over the phone.

(Shinjuku is right in front of Academy City. If these Gremlin people are advancing from Tokyo Bay to Academy City, they should have no reason to stop here. Why aren't they charging straight into Academy City?)

The gigantic traffic jam and all the people spilling out onto the streets meant it was likely some major roads and bridges had been taken out somewhere else. However, that stance seemed somehow insufficient. They could try to attack Academy City without doing any damage to Tokyo in the middle or they could view Tokyo as an obstacle and destroy it as they advanced. However, they were causing sporadic damage without leaning toward one stance or the other.

Mikoto could see no obvious conviction or benefit from doing that.

However, they had to have a reason.

She thought for a while, and then…

"It can't be…"

Part 3

Leivinia Birdway, Lessar, and Kumokawa Maria had no particular sense of camaraderie between them. They had all boarded that supersonic passenger plane because they wanted to stick with Kamijou Touma for their own individual reasons, so that should not have been surprising.

Unlike the other scattered members of the group, they had calmly controlled their midair orientation and opened their parachutes. Their falling distance had been a bit on the short side, but they had greatly bent their knees upon landing to absorb and soften the impact. That had allowed them to land on the asphalt without injury.

Birdway unfastened her parachute, balled it up, and tossed it in a nearby trash gathering spot.

"Where are we? The wind blew us a good ways."

"This shabby disorder makes me think of Kabukicho. Look, the overall cityscape is identical to the one in Tatsu no Gotoshi.[2] Oh, where's the Nice Middle Japanese tattoo shop?"

"Don't think of that as normal scenery in Japan, you damn Westerner. And…ugh. The area above us is filled with power lines. If we had hit those, we might have been electrocuted."

Lessar and Kumokawa Maria gave casual comments, but this was Japan's largest shopping district where girls their age would be taken in by the police if they were found walking around, even during the day. Kumokawa Maria would receive an especially thorough questioning since she was a minor wearing a suspicious-looking maid uniform.

And they soon stopped talking.

But not because they heard police sirens or because a black luxury German car attacked them.

It was due to the low rumbling below their feet.

Near a baseball stadium, even the buildings and train stations built of reinforced concrete would physically shake during a dramatic come-from-behind homerun. When tens of

[2] Means "Like a Dragon". "Ryuu ga Gotoku", also meaning "Like a Dragon", is the Japanese title of the Yakuza series of video games.

thousands of spectators stood up and stamped their feet at the same time, it would produce a shaking detectable on a seismometer.

As magicians, Birdway and Lessar had experience with areas of unrest and Kumokawa Maria had acquired an antenna to detect danger while in Baggage City, so they all detected the dangerous scent immediately.

“This is bad. I don’t know who, but a large number of people are headed this way.”

“Wow. Is this that one where you think it’s gonna be about yakuza, but it’s actually about zombies? Where’s my gun!? I need to find a cabaret club right away!!”

“Again, that should not be what reminds you of Japan, you damn Westerner!! …Are you always joking around like that because you’re trying to motivate yourself?”

At any rate, they would be trapped if they were surrounded by all those people.

The three girls began running away from the source of the rumbling without checking where they were going.

“That was a large train station over there, right?” asked Birdway as she looked over her shoulder.

“Yes. I just hope the destroyed plane didn’t crash into it.”

“We play dirty with our countermeasures to prevent technology from leaking out, so you don’t have to worry about that. As soon as it can no longer fly, a special jet fuel and powerful acid are used to thoroughly destroy the entire plane. The only thing that reaches the ground is a black dust of which the components cannot be analyzed even with a microscope.”

“Oh, I see. So what happened to the pilot?”

“They’re professionals at this sort of thing. We can only pray he wasn’t stupid enough to screw up his escape.”

There were others in their scattered group who had been thrown out into the sky, but those were their only worries. They each seemed to understand that normal common sense would not work with the others.

“I don’t like getting separated from Kamijou Touma at a time like this. His right hand is the cornerstone for attacking Sargasso and stopping the production of the lance.”

While they continued running from the source of the noise, they heard a similar low rumbling coming from a different direction. The directions that noise came from continued to increase until they were surrounded.

Kumokawa Maria pointed arbitrarily to the side.

“Let’s go to a nearby building.”

The nearby multi-tenant buildings were of uneven height and had disorderly decorative lights on them. A dirty metal staircase that was of dubious usefulness as an emergency staircase could be seen between two of the buildings. The three of them ran up that narrow staircase that looked like a collection of folded metal rods.

Immediately afterwards, two waves of people suddenly met up in the narrow intersection as if colliding. It looked like a beach during midsummer. People filled the space so thoroughly that the color of the road could not be seen. Occasional sounds of breaking glass could be heard. Either the overflowing people were breaking through the shop doors or the scooters parked alongside the road were being knocked over.

A deluge of voices came from the crowd. They sounded both angry and uncertain.

“Dammit. How far do we have to walk to catch a cab!?”

“Oh, no. That flying thing isn’t going to come here, is it?”

“Wait, my cell phone seriously isn’t working? But now I can’t upload the video I took! I know I’d get tons of views if I uploaded it!!”

“Ow! Don’t push me, you idiot! I want to get to the station. I need to get a delay certificate…”

However, none of the voices were completely panicked. None of them seemed to feel their life was in danger. It felt more like the extreme of the complaints when traffic was stopped due to a large scale traffic light malfunction.

“This is Gremlin’s doing.” Birdway clicked her tongue while looking down from the staircase landing. “They destroyed a few choice roads in the city to paralyze the transportation network. That must also be why that dragon-like thing is flying around but not attacking Academy City.”

“What do you mean???”

“They’ve made a human wall,” she said in a displeased voice. She may have experienced something similar at some point. “It’s the same as a hardening of the arteries. If you take out an especially large road, the cars have to take a detour down another road. That causes congestion on that smaller road. Once the cars and buses aren’t working, the people start going by foot. This fills the sidewalks and walking paths with people, preventing anyone from moving along them either. The entire system grinds to a halt before long.”

“So they filled the mesh of roads in Tokyo with people so no one can get through. That’s what happens when you have seventeen million people living in such high density. If you destroy even a small number of important points, a barricade of living flesh sets itself up on its own.”

One could not walk from the front of a train to the very back when it was filled with people during rush hour. This was similar to making all of Tokyo the same.

It made sense.

But something seemed off to Kumokawa Maria.

While in Baggage City, she had personally experienced how fiercely Gremlin could attack.

“Is Gremlin really a group that worries about keeping damage to a minimum? If they wanted to create a barricade, they just had to destroy enough buildings to cover up the roads. Masses of concrete seem more reliable than trying to control uncertain flows of people.”

“That’s true,” readily admitted Birdway. “But who is this barricade meant to hold in check? Do you really think a group willing to make an enemy of the entire world would only be worried about us?”

“…? Then who are they trying to stop?”

“A much larger framework,” said Birdway.

Lessar shrugged and gave her guess.

“They are maintaining a situation with little damage but where they can cause great damage and bloodshed at any moment. They’re trying to distribute what people have to gain from this.”

Part 4

Everyone heard the sound of the air being beaten.

The Tokyo Sky Tower was a new Japanese broadcasting tower over six hundred meters tall. That giant steel tower was expected to become more of a landmark than the domed stadium and “it” had quietly landed at the very top.

Its giant form was made up of a massive amount of red thread.

It had thin membrane-like wings, similar to those of a bat.

That strange monster stared down at the concrete city like a bird of prey sitting atop a tree watching for a small animal.

“Shit, isn’t that dangerous!?”

“Posting it online can wait. I need to film that thing!! The guy who finds a new type of animal gets to give it a name, right? Is that in the order you send it in? Where do I send it!? The Tanaka Wyvern is right there!!”

“Something that huge must eat a ton every day. Kh. I hope it eats plankton like a whale!!”

It did not breathe fire and it did not knock down buildings with its giant body, but the majesty of its size and the clear look of a predator in its eyes was enough to put a great pressure on the human psyche. And that effect spread to the vast area from which the Tokyo Sky Tower could be seen.

“Do not fire! I repeat, do not fire!! Do not shoot at it!!”

A particularly noticeable shout rose amid the wave of people large enough to crush anyone fighting against it.

A police uniform was designed to stand out in any situation, but a newcomer who had only just graduated the police academy had lost sight of the owner of the voice.

He shouted out while searching for the figure who had to be somewhere in the darkness.

“Why!? I doubt the handguns we were issued can do anything against that dinosaur-like thing, but a police officer isn’t supposed to just stand by doing nothing!! If that thing charges into all these people…!!”

“That’s why I’m telling you not to provoke it!! Are you prepared to take the blame if an attack causes it to take action? Right now, *there’s still a chance it won’t do anything. So don’t do anything to make it move!!*”

Simply put, that was Gremlin’s aim.

During World War III, countries around the world, whether from the science side or the magic side, had gathered in one spot to bring an end to the war. And that had ultimately been enough to defeat the giant force led by Fiamma of the Right.

Someone may have taken the lead.

Someone may have been the symbol of the group.

But in the end, it had been a large number of people fighting for a common goal that had safely brought an end to that large war that could have easily wiped out mankind. That overwhelming power had miraculously stopped the tragedy that should have occurred.

And so…

Gremlin had planned to distribute that.

They had distributed what people stood to gain.

It was possible they might not draw the joker. If they did not do anything to draw Gremlin's attention, Gremlin might overlook everyone but those opposing their objective. That meager hope destroyed the people's unity. Even though Gremlin, an obvious enemy, stood right before their eyes, something weighed down one side the scales in their minds so heavily that they averted their gaze from what normally would have been their top priority.

And this did not stop with the people of the city fearing for their lives and homes.

Could the people who ran the Japanese government choose to abandon the country's capital city of Tokyo? At the same time, could they allow a battle between Academy City and Gremlin?

United States President Roberto Katze had brought together many different nations and powers to prepare a unified attack on Gremlin.

However, that was stalled as well.

They all wanted to protect different things. Gremlin had used that obvious fact in the worst possible way. People could not gather into a single group. The situation was now one of multiple scattered individuals.

This seemingly small trick had sealed the miracle which had occurred during World War III.

If Gremlin destroyed the most dangerous elements of those scattered individuals, one by one, only a group of those too weak to fight back would remain.

That crowd that uncertainly moved about was destined to be destroyed by Magic God Othinus's power once Gungnir was completed.

Until that instant, the sweet illusion that everything might turn out okay would remain.

"What are the riot police and JSDF doing? There's a monster flying overhead that can fly from one end of Tokyo to the other in just a few minutes!!"

“Stay focused, newcomer!!”

The new police officer’s hand was tugged on forcefully.

He was dragged to a slight space below the staircase to a pedestrian bridge. The flow of people cut off there with almost laughable abruptness.

“Guiding the people to evacuation points comes before glaring at an enemy we can’t hope to defeat! If people start falling like dominos here, how many do you think will be crushed to death!? All of the surrounding roads are blocked up with people. Do you know how dangerous it is to not be able to call in an ambulance!?”

“I do, dammit!!”

Just as the new police officer shouted in desperation, a large number of voices burst out like an explosion. He looked over and saw the flow of people in one direction was being stopped by something. The people were pressing forward with the force to flip over a car, so this had to be something significant.

Had a new monster appeared?

Tension ran through the police officers, but their guess was wrong.

The sound of rubber tires tearing at the ground rang out. Several armored vehicles appeared in a large intersection while scraping alongside the line of cars stuck on the road. These were not the high-pressure water trucks the riot police used. They had tank-like turrets attached on the roof.

“Low pressure smoothbore guns!? They brought those in!?”

“I’m not obsessed with that kind of thing, so I don’t know what that means! Anyway, where did they come from? I thought all of the streets were packed.”

More of the same armored vehicles appeared.

That was when they finally caught on.

“The subway tunnels!? Did they force them through there!?”

“Has the JSDF decided to seriously take that thing on?”

A few seconds later, the new police officer realized he was being too optimistic.

The armored vehicles cut across the intersection and stopped such that they blocked off the flow of people. Their guns would never reach the monster on the tower from there. And most telling of all, the guns on top of the vehicles were not pointed toward the monster. Every single one was pointed directly toward the crowd.

It was as if they were fighting back against the people pressing in.

“That road, Roppongi Street, is one of the representative routes to Kasumigaseki!! They’re solely focused on keeping the VIPs happy at a time like this!?”

♦

“Call center! Shut down all of the computers. Remove the server cables in order. Hurry!!”

A middle-aged man in a plain suit shouted into a rectangular room filled with nothing but rows of computers like a school computer lab.

An office lady inside was wearing the tight skirt uniform required for employees despite having no one around to see it. She whispered to a colleague in the neighboring seat. As this counted as work time on her time card, she made sure to keep her hands moving as she did so.

“What’s that about?”

“Are you serious? Have you not looked out the window at all? The city is in a complete panic. It seems the phones and internet are overloaded, so they can’t check their SNSs and message boards.”

“I don’t want to hear that from the person who toys with her phone while handling customers. Anyway, what does that have to do with shutting down the server? Our selling point is our 24/7 consultation. Keeping the server up seems important to me.”

“That’s just how bad the panic is outside. They don’t want to give any careless answers until coming up with a proper policy. If we start paying out insurance money to all of our clients, we’ll go under.”

“Eh? Is it that bad outside?’

“Yes.”

Insurance companies were businesses that dealt with the small using the large.

Statistically speaking, someone grew ill, had an accident, fell victim to a crime, or was hit by a natural disaster every day. However, those sorts of trouble would only happen a few times in any one individual’s life.

The company would gather an equal amount of money from a large number of customers and pay money back only to an extremely limited number.

The company could provide a large amount of insurance money to each individual client by keeping that ratio intact.

So…

What if a nation's capital was utterly destroyed, over fifteen million people received some kind of damage all at once, and 20% or 30% of an insurance company's clients requested insurance money at the same time?

Simply put, the amount would instantly exceed their available funds and a large corporation known as a financial monster would be felled overnight.

"The higher ups are probably in a panic right now. They'll be digging through the contracts and usage agreements. They'll probably weasel their way out of it similar to how normal fire insurance doesn't cover fires started in an earthquake."

"But that only works because they specifically state that it doesn't cover that. Insurance money is enough to influence the rest of one's life, so I think they'll get some arguments if they say they don't cover it just because it isn't mentioned. After all…"

As the office lady began to continue, the entire floor shook sharply.

A female worker near the window let out a short shriek.

Something large had flown right by the window, but it was not an aircraft. It was a living creature that resembled an eagle. The monster was made up of a great amount of red thread. It looked like a fighter one could only see in a movie.

No one had ever imagined something like that would attack.

And if no one had imagined it, it would not be described in the contracts.

"Yeah… I think it would be best to stay here for a while."

"I hope the company still exists tomorrow. I can only pray the higher ups aren't gathering up all the contents of the safe."

♦

"What do we do?" asked an annoyed man in a dark back alley.

He was wearing a dark blue work uniform and a similarly colored helmet that did not look like it was for construction work. The front of the helmet had a clear face guard attached and a simple baton made of oak wood hung at his waist. A dully-shining silver duralumin case sat at his feet.

He worked for a security company in a group that transported cash.

Several men and women wearing the same outfit stood in that back alley. It was technically a private road and a stainless steel fence and door were set up at the entrance to the alley, so it had not been swallowed up by the flood of people. However, that could change at any time. With that many people, the door could break from the great burden and then people would surge in.

“We can’t get back to the transport truck. And even if we could, it can’t get through those crowds. The nearest branch office is three kilometers away and it’s possible it will have the shutters lowered and the drop-off window sealed up.”

“How many hundreds of millions are in there again?” asked the youngest woman while kicking the silver case with the tips of her toes.

A man with a slight beard and a constant smell of cigarettes spoke up from the side.

“If you hit it too hard, it will send an emergency alarm to the main office.”

“Will they send a helicopter if that happens? If so, I’ll beat the crap out of the thing.”

Their cell phones could not get through.

Their company radios were filled with noise that could just barely be identified as human voices.

Only the police and firefighters did not seem enough to overload that. Someone somewhere must have realized the radio was usable and was sending out signals everywhere, radio laws be damned. All of them came up with the baseless assumption that it was a panicked investor trying to contact the financial market. Security guards who risked their lives transporting money naturally thought of investors when it came to selfish and senseless people.

“What are the company’s regulations? What’s the punishment for abandoning the money and running away?”

“I doubt it’s paying back the full sum. Even if that was the rule, no ordinary worker could hope to pay back that much.”

“Then the company would go bankrupt. There are already only a small number of clients for cash transportation. Once the company loses trust in one neighborhood, the clients will disappear like the receding tide.”

“Then will our manager sue us?”

“Wow. So it’s a life of hellish debt one way or another!?”

However, it was likely impossible to transport hundreds of millions of yen three kilometers by any normal means.

They understood how much of a commotion was occurring.

Something similar to a giant dragon or bird was flying through the sky and highways, elevated railways, and other important points of the transportation network had been destroyed. It was hard to tell if this was a coordinated attack or a natural disaster, but the people crowding the roads had lost any means of transportation. They were not boiling over with malice or hostility.

However, that did not mean they could be 100% trusted.

Someone might suddenly think they would not be caught because the phones were down and the police cars could not drive along the roads. That duralumin case was much too dangerous. It had enough destructive force to burn away someone’s ability to reason.

After thinking through the situation that far, one of the men from the security company moved his eyebrows slightly.

“What is it? That’s an odd expression.”

“Let’s change clothes,” said the man quickly as he glanced around.

They were in a back alley which was a private road, so trash bags and plastic buckets had been gathered without worrying about complaints from the neighbors. He checked through those and chose a few old rags.

The woman’s face stiffened.

“Seriously? It looks like this household put their kitchen trash and paper together as burnable trash.”

“If we wear reinforced outfits as if we are protecting something important, people will target us. Let’s go with this. If we’re dressed like we dig through the trash for food, no one will think we’re transporting cash.”

Their uniforms were made of synthetic fibers, so they were somewhat waterproof. They unlocked the duralumin case, divided the bundles of bills into a few different groups, threw them inside their coats after tying off the sleeves, and collar, and finally tied off the bottom hole. They tossed those inside bags of kitchen waste. …It would stink a bit, but they would have “protected” the cash as long as it was in good enough shape to be exchanged at a bank later.

“People’s dissatisfaction could explode into a riot at any moment, but you want a fair maiden like me to change out in the open? …Won’t that call in even more danger?”

“Don’t worry about it, Miss Judo. And if you were good looking enough to draw in men like that, you wouldn’t be stuck working at a security company that can call you in at all hours.”

“I did aikido, not judo! That’s the slender and delicate Yamato Nadeshiko course!! And why are you all staring at me!? Can’t you be even a little considerate!?”

No matter how unusual the situation was, it would not all end that day.

In order to return to their normal lives tomorrow, they dove into the maelstrom themselves.

♦

A bitter look covered President Roberto Katze’s face as he made a call over a phone line too crude to be called a hotline.

“I don’t care if it’s Atsugi, Yokosuka, or what!! We are preparing to scramble right away. As soon as you give consent, we will help fight that thing!!”

“Yes.” The response from the phone was awkwardly-spoken English as if the speaker was working to pronounce the words exactly as it was written in the textbook. “But we have a duty to protect our citizens, so we have decided the capital of Japan must not be made into a battlefield. Unfortunately, we also have not found another way of attacking the source of the problem.”

“We are monitoring the situation in your country using satellite images. Your unit deployment has no connection to Gremlin’s location. You are cutting off major roads while showing no concern about crushing your own people. You aren’t simply trying to buy time until the Diet building can evacuate to the shelter in Nagatacho Station, are you!?”

“We would never dream of it. We always make the best decision to protect the people of our country. …Um…We fear your suggestion of an allied attack would apply unneeded tension on the Asia-Pacific region, so…let’s see, let’s see…”

“Are you holding the phone in one hand and a script in the other!?”

As soon as Roberto slammed down the receiver, the phone made a hard sound and broke.

Queen Regnant Elizard disinterestedly raised her index finger and spun it around and the Russian Patriarch boy looked around nervously. The gloomy French woman sipped at her coffee that had long since cooled.

Elizard stopped moving her finger while it was pointed at the president.

“Before breaking the phone, you should have asked what Academy City intends to do. Everyone else there barely matters.”

“Do you really think the people who ‘barely matter’ will know what Academy City plans to do? That is a true monster that waged a major war as an independent city.”

The presidential aide, Roseline, held her head in her hands.

“The Japanese government is divided on the issue. Academy City has made no announcement and they could view a force gathered to attack Tokyo Bay as an enemy. If Gremlin intentionally created this power balance, they did an amazing job.”

Sooner or later, someone had to make the decision to attack the Sargasso on Tokyo Bay. The Japanese government would not want their capital city trapped between Academy City and Sargasso for long. They would have to fight eventually.

But the situation was currently a race against time.

Japan would be having their politicians escape to shelters, preserving their assets, and transferring their administrative cloud systems and financial trading servers. However, Roberto could not wait around until they had backed up the functions of the capital, secretly dispersed them to several regional cities, and otherwise made sure they would be fine even if Tokyo was reduced to a pile of rubble. They only had half a day. Those twelve hours would decide the history of the world.

“Academy City should make their move soon,” quietly said the Roman pope, Pietro Yogdis. “The question is whether they will bother distinguishing between Gremlin and our allied force. If they choose to kill everything that uses the phenomenon called magic which they cannot understand, the situation will fall into complete chaos.”

“For one thing, it is hard to say we are completely trusted by Academy City.” The French woman removed the coffee cup from her lips and spoke in almost a whisper. “Academy City may think another magical group will try to attack them within the confusion caused by Gremlin. If so, they will begin an utterly meaningless multi-sided attack. They will increase the bloodshed that no one but Gremlin wants.”

“B-but… This doubt and these constraints are all part of Gremlin’s attempt to buy time, right? We need to work to have as many people we can trust, even if only slightly,” said the Russian Orthodox boy.

However, no one voiced full agreement with him.

There was no time to sow the seeds and wait for them to bud.

President Roberto Katze scratched at his head and spoke.

“I hear that Academy City and the Anglican Church joined forces during World War III. Do you have a hotline we could use?”

“That was the Anglicans doing. The Royal Family was barely involved. …But I doubt it would help. It seems they have been unable to contact Chairman Aleister since the war ended. Some have even questioned whether he is in the city at all.”

“So even the Anglicans who are closest to them have no idea what’s going on there, is that it?”

Even with this allied force, there were a lot of unknown factors concerning whether they could sink the Sargasso which functioned as Gremlin’s base.

And on top of that, Academy City was a giant black box.

They could not tell what would happen. How much damage would be done? Could they stop the crisis to the world even if some damage was done? All they knew was that the time limit until the completion of the lance grew ever closer. And as it did, the odds of the allied force’s attack succeeding dropped. And once those odds reached zero, they would never again have a chance to fight back.

Their decision could cause a great number of people to sink into pools of blood.

Later historians might curse them and textbooks might call them truly foolish leaders.

The power of “what if” bound the actions of every force with the power to oppose Gremlin.

“President,” said Roseline quickly.

Hearing that, Roberto Katze finally gave a small smile.

“What we must do hasn’t changed. Let’s take a vote.”

“Are we using a democratic decision to distribute the responsibility?”

“No. Only those who agree will go along with this. Any true fools who aren’t afraid of death will come with me.”

Part 5

“Communications are still down and there’s no message on the disaster message board.”

Kamijou thought as he ran down the exposed metal stairs of the partially-constructed building.

Returning to Academy City was not an option.

For one thing, Academy City was surrounded by thick walls. He had left by irregular means, so he would have to explain the irregular situation if he turned back. He doubted he could manage that without Lessar or Birdway.

On top of that, Gremlin was sending a powerful force out from their base on Tokyo Bay. Kamijou did not know where Academy City would set up their defensive line, but the walls around the city would truly become the final line of defense. They might very well seal off all entrances into the city.

(That means my objective has to be Sargasso!! I need to stop the production of the lance and defeat the source of all of this. I don't see any other way to ensure safety than to calm down this commotion!!)

He would have to cut across almost the entire capital city, but he could not use the normal roads after descending from the building. The remains of the fallen crane had blocked off traffic, but both the road and sidewalk had become filled with waves of people in only a few minutes. It would be difficult to walk through there, much less use a bus or taxi.

That left…

(Where am I anyway? I'm not too familiar with the area outside Academy City.)

The partially-constructed building had no windows or outer walls. Outside that building of exposed floors and metal pillars, he saw a strange building that looked like rugby ball stood up on end.

(The subway! Even if the trains are stopped and the station is filled with people, the tunnels should be almost abandoned!!)

♦

While standing perpendicular to the station building's wall, Misaka Mikoto used both hands to hold Index who she had been supporting with only one arm.

"Here we go!!"

She altered the aim of her power to control magnetism in order to move from building to building.

Index desperately held onto the calico cat so it did not fall and managed to shout out while being tossed about by their midair movement.

"Go where!?"

“If I know that idiot, he won’t give any thought to retreating or getting to safety. The city may have fallen into chaos, but heading to that base called Sargasso should be the best way to meet up with him again! We may be taking different routes, but we all have the same goal!!”

She jumped between the rooftops and walls of the high-rise buildings. The surface was as crowded as the starting point of a marathon wherever she looked, but the sky was surprisingly clear.

However, that did not mean there were no risks.

(How far is it to Tokyo Bay? Twenty kilometers? Thirty? I hope I don’t run out of energy before I get there. In fact, this only really begins once we arrive, so it would be really bad if I was out of breath there.)

“Short Hair! Hey, Short Hair!!”

“Damn you!! Is that any way to talk to someone who is currently in the process of saving your life!?”

“Watch out! Something’s coming!!”

Mikoto saw motion before Index had even finished speaking.

While holding Index in both hands, Mikoto landed perpendicularly on the side of a high-rise building. As soon as she did, she saw sparks floating down from over a hundred meters up as if during a forest fire.

When each spark struck the glass-covered wall, it produced a giant pillar of fire perpendicular to the wall to match Mikoto’s orientation.

Those pillars of fire twisted and gained form. They produced countless human figures.

“This is a Norse mythology based spell. It uses the symbols of army, enemy, flame, and heat. …Is this the Muspell? This might be a group of automatic attack spells set to feel artificial hatred for those who match certain conditions.”

Mikoto did not understand any of what Index was muttering under her breath.

However, the physical threat was obvious enough. Below the feet of those flame figures standing perpendicular to the wall, the glass began to glow orange and melt like candy. The melting point of glass was approximately 1,400 degrees, so these figures could easily kill a human by embracing them or even just breathing on them.

“Cheh,” lightly spat out Mikoto. A hostile look filled her eyes. “I guess the path to reach that idiot isn’t going to be easy!!”

♦

“There’s something here,” said Birdway.

She, Lessar, and Kumokawa Maria had decided to use the rivers rather than the roads, railroad, or air. First, they had entered the sewers through a random manhole. If they followed that path, they would arrive at the drain that emptied into a river. From there, they could follow the bank until they arrived at the ocean. Ideally, they could steal a motorboat or something on the way, but they could always walk otherwise.

But something happened while they were still in the sewers.

Fluttering sparks flickered within the almost completely dark space. And yet there should have been no way for those sparks to blow in from a distance in that sealed location.

“As expected, they have a trap spell that automatically detects and attacks people who are not ‘stalled’. This monster is set up to appear when people exceed a certain speed. …The businessmen and investors who tried to flee with helicopters and chartered planes might have been wiped out.”

Just as she spoke, a tremendous noise was followed by giant pillars of fire appearing to block their path through the sewer. They twisted oddly and gained form to produce human figures.

“The flame army of Norse mythology!”

“The Muspell! They oppose the gods with the giant Surtr as their leader, right!?”

Birdway and Lessar seemed to understand, but Kumokawa Maria did not. All she could guess was that the close quarters combat she specialized in would not work on these collections of flames.

“What are you two talking about!?”

“I’m amazed someone so ignorant could survive Gremlin’s attack on Baggage City. Are you the kind of person that gets by on luck?”

“Could you maybe pay attention to the enemies moving in as you chat?”

With the unnerving sound of the air being sucked in, the flame figures known as Muspell swelled up like round balloons.

“Wait, don’t tell me…”

A certain unpleasant thought came to Kumokawa Maria, but she could see no way of countering it. Having this happen in a sealed sewer tunnel was very bad.

And the enemy was not going to wait around.

After taking in all of that air and heating it up to over 1,400 degrees Celsius, they would blow it back out with tremendous force.

It would be less of a hot blast of air and more like the orange spear that was stuck inside a furnace.

Being struck by that would fry a human as much as sticking them in a steam oven.

Breathing in just a bit would horribly burn the trachea and lungs.

One’s hastily shut eyelids would melt and the eyeballs inside would boil.

Almost anyone could easily imagine how difficult it would be to physically avoid a wind being blown at them. Even if one knew that wind would be fatal, there was nothing they could do. And this was a sewer tunnel. Kumokawa and the others would be hopelessly cornered like a bug in a bath pipe while the pipe was being cleaned.

However…

“A blazing wind. …Flames. Or is it primarily wind? Anyway, as long as you know the proper attribute, it is simple to deal with. Adding on some little tricks does not change its true essence!!”

At some point, a wand had appeared in Leivinia Birdway’s hand.

In the blink of an eye, it transformed into a sword.

“The color is yellow, the shape is a dagger. With the action of defense and the symbol of flow and change, one of the five great internal symbols of my temple shall be contained in my hand!!”

It twisted.

It distorted.

The massive blazing wind which should have filled the entire closed space began to spin around the dagger in Birdway’s hand. The compressed and pointed tornado this created looked like a giant sword. Birdway thrust the tornado sword raging about her hand into the sewer water flowing down the center of the tunnel.

With a sound like water being thrown on a hot metal plate, the tornado vanished.

“Norse mythology is a mythology of mutual destruction. There are enemies prepared for each of the gods. …And the same applies to the Muspell and their king, Surtr.”

Lessar’s voice was followed by a reverberating metallic noise.

Kumokawa Maria did not know where she had been hiding it, but Lessar was holding a strange tool that looked like a mechanical arm created by adding multiple blades to the end of a long handle.

Lessar began shouting something nonsensical while opening and closing the blade “fingers” of the hand.

“The king of the world of fire and the weather god Freyr both die after battling each other. The deer antler carried by Freyr could not be removed by the followers of the king! The masses who cannot match the king even as a group can only accept defeat!! Let the subjugation of the strict scales fill you with the order of my temple!!”

Lessar complexly folded up the blade fingers as if forming a special sign and then swung it to the side. In response, every last one of the flame figures was ripped apart regardless of distance. It looked like a powerful gust of wind blowing out the unreliable flames of a few candles.

Before Kumokawa Maria’s eyes was the frightening scene of the reason of the world being twisted for an individual’s convenience.

However, she did not have time to be overwhelmed by that result.

“Don’t cause a reaction between the sewer water and those explosive flames! Are you trying to create dioxin!?”

“Either way, we can’t stay here long. This won’t be too bad if this is completely automated and we just get more of the same enemy, but I doubt it will be that easy. To put it simply, we should expect a more powerful enemy to come now that we’ve defeated these ones.”

The three of them ran toward the exit to the river.

The other scattered members of their group were likely in the same or even more dangerous situations.

“At any rate, we need to head for Sargasso. We won’t necessarily be able to use Kamijou Touma’s right hand, but we have to do the most we can. If he alone reaches Sargasso, he’ll die before he is able to use that right hand of his. And if we do nothing, the world is scheduled to end in half a day. It would be most constructive to bet on the possibility of him arriving, no matter how unlikely it might be.”

However, none of them raised a voice of worry.

They were all on their way to the same place, so they would meet up eventually.

Part 6

There were plenty of sports gyms, fitness clubs, and athletic gyms in the city. Japan's capital city was mocked for having rabbit cages for houses, so it needed other areas prepared for exercise.

In one such facility which was centered on an indoor pool, Kamijou Shiina and Misaka Misuzu were watching the commotion.

"Oh, dear. Oh, dear. What is going on?"

"Wow. The entire road outside is as crowded as a store during a major sale. Are they having a parade or something? I don't keep up with the international soccer games…"

A young instructor was yelling something into a megaphone near the entrance to the pool. It seemed they did not want anyone leaving the facility until the crowds died down.

Misuzu pulled her waterproof cell phone from the chest of her swimsuit.

"The internet and email are frozen. Oh, even the phone will only connect to the disaster message board."

"Now we cannot know what is happening."

Shiina had tried to watch a 1seg news broadcast, but the reception was too poor to display the program properly. She did not understand it well enough to know that the many irregular signals being sent out were creating too great a burden.

Shiina elegantly tilted her head while wearing her wet swimsuit.

"What should we do?"

"I live alone, so I'll be fine even if I have to stay here. What about you?"

"I should be fine."

As she spoke, Shiina held her cell phone in one hand and began pressing buttons one at a time with her other hand. Shockingly, she was operating it entirely with her index finger. Misuzu asked a casual question.

“Who are you calling? I don’t think you can get through to anyone.”

“Yes, but I thought I would leave a message saying I am fine on the message board.”

“I see. I guess it would be best to leave a message.”

While chatting, the two housewives attempted to use the unfamiliar message service.

Even as various boys and girls fought Gremlin with the fate of the world hanging in the balance, these two were as carefree as ever.

Part 7

Unlike the ground which was paved with asphalt roads, people often held an image of freedom and wide open space when it came to the sea and sky.

However, reality was different.

As the terms like sea route and airway suggest, the sea and sky had fixed routes as well. Focus was usually placed on the shortest distance in order to minimize fuel costs, but that was not always possible. There were power balances along national borders, weather conditions, and most importantly, the overwhelming number of ships and airplanes travelling every day. Those masses of steel filled the air like a mesh pattern and it had become normal for takeoffs and landings to occur every few minutes at international airports. In these conditions, one had to follow a set route guided by a precise control system to avoid having ships or airplanes collide with each other.

In that case, it was not too difficult to seal off the routes of the sea and sky that seemed to stretch on forever.

It only took one point.

If one controlled a single important point on the invisible traffic network in the sea or sky, one could paralyze transportation across those vast territories.

In other words, it was not much different from causing a giant traffic jam by blowing up a highway or railroad.

A formation of Russian air force bombers was flying through that constrained sky.

The formation contained three subsonic bombers which could carry nuclear weapons and eight large fighters for protection. They were not accompanied by an aerial refueling aircraft. In order to protect the world’s most vast country, Russian-made aircraft were

often developed for long-distance reconnaissance and could therefore fly for hours at a time. Those fighters even had a simple kitchen aboard.

“Is there any point in this? We don’t have any bombs loaded.”

“The world police told us to knock some sense into Japan’s indecisive head. As usual, those comrade bastards get to be the allies of justice while we in Russia have to play the rogue villain. Someday, I want to blow away Geneva and New York.”

“Do you think this will make those Hinomaru Bentos act?”

“It’s about having a nice balance. If America did it, it would cause an international incident.”

The bomber formation’s mission was to send a threat to the Japanese government. They would be saying, “The allied force is going to take action without your approval. In fact, we already have☆ Shooting your fighters down over your cities would be a pain, so stay out of our way.”

It was mostly a bluff.

And there was a reason why Russia had acted first.

That reason was not simply because they were so close to Japan.

“It’s amazing, really. Russian spy planes and bombers encroach on Japanese airspace so often that only the most important parts of the government are informed. Talk about getting your priorities backwards.”

“I heard that, during the Cold War, a bomber loaded with a nuke flew right over Tokyo for some sightseeing and they still didn’t panic. They’ve been trained like Pavlov’s dog. They baselessly assume they’re safe no matter what we do.”

“But then the Hinomaru Bentos won’t act, will they?”

“We’re leaving a sign to show we aren’t just sightseeing. The door boys will be making their way here before long. We’ll shake their hand and without a rock-paper-scissors tournament. If we hit them with a targeting radar signal, they’ll pale and report it.”

If Russia interfered in an argument between Japan and America, the situation would begin to move bit by bit until an avalanche built up and the allied force was making their way to Tokyo Bay. It would become a horrible problem later, but politicians excelled at having soldiers simply move their arms and legs rather than trying to use their insufficient brains. Occasionally, it was time for those politicians in charge of the “brains” to suffer.

The tactical bombers had nothing major loaded inside, but that was impossible to tell from the outside.

And if told to clean the toilet, a soldier would immediately grab a brush and cleaner. If told to perform in a play at a school arts festival, they would put on the animal costume. They would hum and chow down on some pirozhki while not hesitating to trick someone into thinking the world was coming to an end.

That was when it happened.

There should have been no difficulty, but none of them had let their guard down.

Yet someone suddenly dropped down and grabbed on to the main wing of one of the bombers.

Unlike passenger planes, bombers did not have plenty of windows along the side. As such, the crew of the bomber in question could not see what had caused the abnormality.

The first report came over the radio.

It came from the fighter flying quite nearby.

“What? Hey, what!? There’s something clinging to your wing… You’ve gotta be kidding me. The altimeter and speedometer are working properly, so what is that!?”

“What is it, newcomer. Frogs and fish are sometimes spotted ten thousand meters up. Tornadoes and the like send them up. At the very least, it isn’t the doing of UFOs or aliens.”

“It’s a human. A human is clinging to your left main wing!! Shake him off. Shake him off of your wing! I don’t know why, but this looks dangerous!!”

“…???”

The bomber’s crew had no idea what that meant, but every other plane in the formation changed course as if twisting around. If they were left behind, there could easily be a collision within the formation. The pilot frantically moved the bomber to follow which naturally shook the main wing.

“No good. He won’t fall off! What is he!?”

“Newcomer, explain what’s going on! Keeping this up will just leave us flying in circles!!”

“His hand…is glowing.”

“…Hey.”

“What is that? What is that!? Is it a bomb or welding blowtorch? You’re kidding… Is he trying to cut off the main wing!?”

A horrible chill ran down the pilot’s spine.

And in the next moment, the giant bomber shook unnaturally.

And…

♦

The boy known as Jörmungandr among his comrades jumped along the main wing of a Russian tactical bomber. He should have been blown away by the subsonic wind of the plane’s speed and even standing unprotected at ten thousand meters was not normal, but he landed a short distance away as easily as a child playing in a park.

The vibration from before had not been the boy’s doing.

It had been the interference of someone else trying to stop him.

“Oh?”

Jörmungandr laughed.

He laughed as he saw the pillar of fire unnaturally spreading before his eyes.

Technically, it was not just a pillar of fire.

It was a three meter tall monster in the shape of a human. It was a type of spell known as Innocentius.

“In modern magical combat, it is easy enough for magicians to fly, but causing them to fall is just as easy. That’s why the standard theory is to not rise above ten meters,” said Jörmungandr while ignoring the fact he had flown up there.

He then used his index and middle finger to grab something that was flying through the air.

It was a rune.

That laminated card contained a character that held Norse power.

“*By using no magic to send these up into the air, they can’t be shot down with magic.* Did you use the strange phenomenon you occasionally hear about where frogs and fish fall from the sky like rain? Did you blast a bundle of cards up in a tornado and only then activate the attack magic?”

A voice replied to Jörmungandr.

The boy could not tell if there was some other type of card or if Innocentius was speaking.

“You may think it is reliable and not very interesting, but that is why it has no weaknesses. For one thing, that which stands before you has no concept of damage. Go right ahead and attack it and crush it as much as you want. I do not have time to deal with small fries.”

“Ha ha ha.” The boy could not hold back his laughter as he clung to the main wing. “Did you think the attacks would only go one way because you aren’t here? Don’t be so naïve. I can find your true location from the site of the tornado. And…”

As he spoke, he raised his index finger.

A sphere of purple-glowing light grew to the size of a ping pong ball on the tip of his finger.

“Jörmungandr is a giant serpent that wraps around the entire world. However, the legends do not have it crush its enemies with its giant body or swallow its enemies whole. Jörmungandr’s greatest attack is the symbol of what allowed it to kill the lightning god while also being killed by him.”

He pointed that finger not at Innocentius before him but at the Sea of Japan far below.

And he spoke.

“That is its immensely poisonous breath which can even kill the gods in heaven.”

Immediately afterwards, something purple and carrying lethality shot straight down toward the ocean like ultra high pressure water being used to cut sheets of steel.

It was one against one.

A battle between magicians began with no safe areas and with both their lives hanging in the balance.

Part 8

The area was filled with such great confusion that there was nowhere to stand.

But at the same time, it had happened too suddenly for most stores to close their shutters. Part of it came down to not wanting to take unneeded actions. By not doing anything differently than normal, they hoped to avert their gaze and not accept reality. A lot of the store clerks had likely decided to stay at the register because they were afraid to go outside.

At a fishing pond in Ichigaya near a subway station, someone halfway between being a girl and a woman had a fishing line dangling down while sitting on an upside down beer case. She was fair skinned, her eyes were blue, and her hair was short and wavy. She looked just barely old enough to be in college, but she was wearing a maternity dress and her stomach stuck out as if in the last month of pregnancy.

“Yes, yes.”

The fishing pole was not getting a single bite.

After all, the entire area was filled with people. Just a single step outside of the fishing pond area was a crowd of people like in a train during rush hour. In fact, it was so packed that it made one doubt if they could enter into that wave of people.

Just as a commotion at a large stadium or concert would shake the ground, the tension had to be transferring into the water.

“Yes, yes… Well, I went ahead into Tokyo just as Thor asked. I suppose Thor and Mökkurkalfe will take root at Tokyo Bay. Hm, what about Bersi? Well, that doesn’t matter. This is so boring. Dammit… I haven’t caught a single fish. I want a nice healthy one.”

And…

The woman in the maternity dress showed no sign of caring about the commotion.

There was something different about her when compared to the other fishers who were staring blankly into the distance to escape from the reality of the situation. It was not that she was slow to accept reality. Instead, she had already adapted to it.

“The improvised Níðhöggr I gave birth to is resting on top of the Tokyo Sky Tower after circling around the city. Yes, and the Muspell are reacting here and there. Everything is going as planned. Ha ha ha. I knew it would. When we drive most of the people into a standstill by distributing what people stand to gain, a few irregulars are bound to appear. …But that just means we have to crush them one by one before they can gather.”

The woman spoke disinterestedly while pressing something against her ear.

Even if they did not know what she was saying, the people around her began to pay attention to this action. The great confusion in the city had left normal cell phones unusable. When no one could check on the safety of their family, friends, lovers, and others close to them, a communication device was as valuable as a jewel.

“It seems the Muspell are being destroyed, so I need to prepare something nastier before long. I guess I can’t just sit around here any longer.”

“Hey…”

That woman with short wavy hair had a large protruding pregnant belly that did not match her young age.

Some people felt they could not act violently toward her once they saw it.

Some people felt they would have an easy time attacking her once they saw it.

“Wait a second. That’s a cell phone, right? Hey, could I borrow it. Please let me borrow it! Just a minute! I just need it for a minute!!”

A man called out to her from the side.

By the time the woman realized that, the man had already grabbed the slender hand she was holding to her head.

But she paid him no heed.

She merely glanced over and muttered something under her breath.

In the next instant, something leapt from the fishing pond, took the man’s body into its mouth, and instantly dragged him into the water.

Everyone there had to have seen what it was.

However, none of them would have been able to explain it. None of them would have been able to draw a picture of it.

All that remained in their minds was terror.

It held such overwhelming dignity that they felt their minds would burst if they did not turn their focus elsewhere.

“Okay. With that, I’ll head out to the place where the most Muspell have been defeated.”

No one was able to do anything.

No one restrained the woman in the maternity dress and no one rescued the man who had sunk into the water.

The woman merely leisurely held the fishing pole.

The pole suddenly bent like a bow.

However, this was no ordinary bite. She had clearly not caught a fish. But it was not the unidentified monster from before. The sound of something splashing against the water’s surface could be heard. The barbed fishing hook had stabbed into some part of the man from before’s body.

The woman in the maternity dress stood up from her seat made of an upside down beer case and casually tossed the pole to the closest fisher. She yawned a bit and walked toward the exit without showing any concern for her large belly. She walked toward that crowd that looked like something a woman as pregnant as her would want to avoid at all costs.

Lastly, what the woman held was not a cell phone.

It was a wooden charm.

It was a communication spiritual item that had a few runes burned into it.

“So wait for me, formidable enemy. The fertility goddess Freyja will be your opponent☆”

Part 9

The only way to the nearest subway station was to force his way through the crowds.

After leaving the partially-constructed building, Kamijou moved along with the flow of people and desperately made his way forward, bit by bit, even as the great crowd tossed him about. Once he arrived at the entrance to a subway station labeled “Imperial Capital Metro Marunouchi Line”, he opened an emergency disaster prevention door instead of using the normal stairway down.

“Bhah!!”

Finally freed from the waves of people, Kamijou placed a hand on the wall and let out a large breath. He felt so hot he almost forgot it was November and an unpleasant sweat covered his entire body.

(How am I supposed to reach the platform from here? At any rate, I need to get back to the normal areas of the station.)

He began to run.

Unnatural sparks floated about in the air. They produced pillars of fire and several flame figures appeared, but Kamijou did not stop running. He did not know what made them appear or how they attacked, but Imagine Breaker in his right hand could negate any supernatural power. As such, the best option here was to not give it much thought and simply blow them away before they could attack.

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhh
hhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!”

Flames and explosions were symbols that would bring fear to anyone, but Kamijou shouted as loud as he could and forcibly suppressed those instinctual feelings. He held back his heart that wanted to put on the brakes and he ran toward that "oddity" as quickly as he could. He approached, swung his fist up, and defeated them before he could even determine what they were.

Fortunately, they did not seem to have the same extreme regenerative ability as Innocentius.

He blew away that wall of flames and continued running.

(Is something calling these things in? Is it random or are they targeting me? Are they locating me somehow? How does it work?)

A few theories appeared in Kamijou's mind, but his knowledge was no match for Index's or Birdway's. He merely had guesses floating around in his head with no proof or foundation.

"There we go."

At the end of the long passageway was a stainless steel door that opened toward the corridor. If it had opened the other way, it most likely would not have opened. That was how many people there were on the other side.

"Uuh… What? Is this really the station platform?"

He felt a bit guilty over entering without buying a ticket, but this was not the time to worry about that.

The platform was a little different from the roads above.

It was packed with people from one end to the other. The people who had been waiting for a train that never seemed to arrive had collided with the people who had gone to the station as their last hope after the busses and taxis obviously were not going to work. If many more people entered, people would start falling from the platform.

From the looks of things, it would take a while to even climb down into the tunnel.

But just as Kamijou thought that, a mass of steel shot by with tremendous force and produced a great roar.

It was a five-car train.

It had no intention of stopping at this platform. It shot from the exit of one tunnel and into the other without slowing down. Even in this confusion, some people must have decided to complain to a station worker because angry shouts could be heard.

(The subway is running? They obviously aren't keeping the usual schedule, so maybe the police or the government are using them. At any rate, this means walking through the tunnels won't be safe.)

However, that presented a new possibility. Kamijou did not know how often the trains ran through the tunnels, but if he could jump onto the roof of one…

(The tunnel. Is there no way to get up above the tunnel? Is there a ventilation duct maybe? I need something to drop down onto a train from above the platform.)

The ventilation ducts in subway stations connected directly to the surface and merely allowed one to feel the flow of air when a train passed through. It was most easily described by the image of the world's most famous Hollywood actress having her skirt blown up.

Of course, the surface was too crowded to remove the cover there and climb in.

However, the ducts themselves were made quite large to allow in a lot of air and prevent a lack of oxygen yet were focused on the one exit point on the surface. In that case…

(It doesn't matter where. I just need some way into the duct so I can travel directly above the platform.)

He returned to the evacuation corridor.

He glanced around in search of a duct and spotted a notice he had not seen on his way there. It described the route to avoid smoke, so it gave the area and height of the station and tunnels with actual numbers.

(The way the tunnel gets quite low at some points scares me, but this is no time to be complaining. I need to drop onto the roof and stay crouched down.)

He looked up and spotted the cover for a duct on the low ceiling. He grabbed it with both hands and it easily came off. He stretched out both hands, grabbed the edge, and forcibly climbed up as if performing a pull-up.

"Dammit!! It's all sticky in here!!"

There were shops and restaurants inside the station, so steam and smoke would often flow through the duct. The slight particles inside had collected over long periods of time. Kamijou had to crawl through it all, so he could only pray it had not become the home of flies and roaches.

It was mostly a straight path, but it had a few right angle turns. He had the feeling he was taking a long way around, but he could not back up now. He was forced to follow that winding path toward the area above the platform.

In truth, he travelled maybe fifty meters.

As he began rubbing at his eyes, Kamijou finally arrived at his destination. He may have cleaned the duct somewhat with his school uniform.

None of the sparks or flame figures from before appeared. He began to wonder if it was due to moving below a certain speed or due to being in such a cramped space.

He removed the duct cover and could tell he was directly above the track running alongside the platform.

He was only a few meters up, but he felt a different kind of chill than when he was hanging from the crane on that building. He could actually imagine this height in his head and he also had to fear falling down, spraining his ankle, and being hit by a train.

When the previous train had passed by, there had been no announcement.

He needed a different sign to judge the timing.

(When a train arrives at a subway station, it brings a gust of wind because it pushes the air. I have to use that as a sign.)

This was not a definite answer.

If he was wrong and messed up his timing, he could fall down in front of the train.

In fact, he was not sure he would be fine even if he did land perfectly on the roof of the train.

He had no choice but to entrust his life in something he knew almost nothing about. The overwhelming pressure of that fact made him want to roll over and give up right then and there. He had no safer plan and the situation would only grow worse as he tried to search for one.

He heard a low rumbling.

His throat grew dry.

He waited one, two, three seconds.

And then it came in an instant.

Something filled his vision. A clunking roar struck his ears a moment later. He was too late. And by the time he realized that, the five-car train had already disappeared into the other tunnel. If he had dropped down that time, his body would have slammed into the track.

An unpleasant sweat spread across his entire back.

He could tell his breathing was gradually growing erratic.

"…"

(I know the timing now. To a certain extent. It comes five seconds after hearing the wind. After five seconds, the train passes by. If I throw myself down with that timing, I should land on the train's roof.)

Fortunately, there was not a long gap between trains.

After a few minutes, the next train came.

He waited.

And this time…

Just as the train arrived, Kamijou Touma forcefully jumped down from the duct.

A metallic thud exploded out.

Kamijou had safely fallen on the roof, but a tremendous force caused his body to spin like a top the instant his body touched it. Finally, his hip struck a protrusion similar to an external air conditioner. He cried out as intense pain ran up his spine and he reached out to grab onto the protrusions of the train's roof in a desperate attempt to not slide off.

The five-car train instantly entered the tunnel.

"Gh… Pant pant!!"

He caught his breath and somehow put up with the pain as he lay on his back.

(I-I'm finally making my way to Tokyo Bay. If this train turns out to be headed the other way, I'm going to get seriously depressed.)

The distance to the ceiling was shorter than he had expected, but it was not so short that he had to lie down in order to not touch it. In fact, the height changed frequently. In the higher areas, the walls and ceiling were often covered in construction sheets.

(In the areas where old infrastructure is being repaired, are they raising the ceilings to give smoke somewhere to go during fires? But an amateur like me has no way of knowing how far the tunnel repairs will last. It may be safer to remain lying down for a while.)

Kamijou actually had no idea where the train was headed, but it at least seemed to be moving east which was toward Tokyo Bay.

As he thought that, Kamijou's vision was suddenly filled with bright whiteness.

"!?"

His eyes had grown so used to the dark tunnel that this sudden shock caused physical pain.

It took him a bit to realize the train had merely left the tunnel and appeared aboveground.

And…

He heard a loud thunk.

He desperately blinked his dazzled eyes and tried to look in front of him. Someone seemed to be standing there. It looked like a woman just barely old enough to be in college. However, something was odd. Kamijou could not figure out what it was at first, but he finally caught on.

It was her stomach.

She wore a loose maternity dress and her stomach swelled out like a woman in the final month of pregnancy.

"Nheh heh☆ I decided to check on the target with the highest Muspell kill count, and it looks like I have to fight after all. Well, I intentionally left this one track intact in order to draw in all the most formidable enemies."

"Who are you?"

"Freyja. Is telling you I'm a Norse goddess enough for you to catch on? Just because we're on a train is no reason to worry about the pregnant woman. There are no priority seats on the roof and it doesn't look like you're in any condition to do anything anyway."

Norse mythology.

That could be called the foundation of Gremlin.

The train shot back into another tunnel.

The magician going by the name Freyja continued speaking while her eyes sparkled in the slight light of the fluorescent lights.

“You should be honored. I have decided you are currently the biggest threat to Gremlin and thus must be defeated first☆”

In the next moment, something burst from behind her that further overwhelmed the darkness.

Between the Lines 3

It resembled a flower.

Dark Matter that resembled a carpet or flower petals spread out in the eight directions around a beautiful white girl. All of it, including the girl standing in the center, was a single system. Gungnir could not be completely constructed even with the use of every kind of magic. This was the result of reaching into the realm of science to forcibly fill that technical gap.

At its essence, it was a simple device.

It had a human form but no mind. It could not really be called a living being. There was no fire in the furnace. As soon as their objective was achieved, this hollow doll would be destroyed and disappear.

“My role is complete,” said a gloomy man.

He went by two names: Bersi and Kihara Kagun.

He had just finished stabbing the final of countless cables into the eight giant flower petals stretching from the girl’s feet.

“This holistic esper and everything else are Marian Slingeneyer’s territory. I see nothing more I must do. Give me my next instruction.”

The girl named Othinus did not even turn her one uncovered eye toward Kihara Kagun.

“Head out to intercept our enemies. Destroy everything you need to destroy and buy us time. That is all.”

“Understood.”

The fact that Gremlin’s base was located on Tokyo Bay was already known around the world. That was not a problem for them. They did not intend to hole up inside Sargasso forever. It was only meant to let them complete the lance. Once Othinus had the lance, she could destroy everything in the next moment, so it was no problem at all.

Once that moment came, it would all be over.

Kihara Kagun walked across the countless remnants of ships that made up Sargasso. His pace had the uniformity of the second hand on a clock as he walked to one end. A few usable motorboats were located there. He climbed aboard one and travelled out into the ocean.

The mountain-like Mökkurkalfe formed a shadow behind the white steam covering the ocean.

Kihara Kagun travelled toward the Tokyo coast.

He rode the boat up to the concrete coast at the harbor.

Several dozen to several hundred figures were visible there.

They were police officers, riot police, and JSDF.

They all belonged to different organizations and groups, but they all seemed to be those who preserved the peace of the country.

To ensure their enemies did not gather into a single large group, Gremlin distributed what everyone stood to gain so everyone would naturally get in each other's way. For that reason, no unified force had come against Gremlin and everyone had stayed put despite knowing what a crisis lay before their eyes. In other words, the situation was engineered so no order could be given to attack Gremlin. However, it seemed a group of volunteers had gathered together without waiting for official orders. Special vehicles were visible here and there. That situation alone would normally have been a large enough incident to show up on tabloids.

Sargasso was visible even from that distance.

Or more accurately, the giant shadow of Mökkurkalfe was visible as it slowly circled around Sargasso.

Kihara Kagun felt nothing even as he watched that group attempt to motivate each other.

His entire body had ceased to function, including the portion that controlled emotions.

In life, he had had a single objective and he had already perfectly carried out that revenge.

He had built up a great amount of magic for that objective.

And that empty shell which had lost all ideals and belief now unhesitatingly charged toward that group while armed with that powerful magic.

CHAPTER 4

Disaster in the Depths of Fertility.

Goddess_of_Fertility.

Part 1

The unrest and tension had spread even to Kanzaki Kaori, Vasilisa, and Sasha Kreutzev, the skilled magicians acting as bodyguards beyond the thick glass.

“Did you *read* what they were saying inside?”

“More or less.” Vasilisa gave a simple shrug and a thin smile as she watched the movements of their lips. “It looks like things have gotten a bit crazy. Their base is right in front of Academy City in Tokyo Bay.”

“This makes me feel like being here as a bodyguard was part of Gremlin’s manipulation as well. Some powerful people had to be sent to protect the VIPs, so they could remove us from the front lines by having an unofficial international conference held.”

“We still don’t know anything and you’re already worrying about everything and doubting everyone? You Anglicans are surprisingly weak to information warfare. Thinking about all that won’t help. What matters in an emergency is to do everything as you always would. It’s better than panicking and falling into confusion.”

Having said that, Vasilisa pulled something from her hair.

It was a small charm made of parchment.

“Okay, did you hear that, everyone? Crush every member of Gremlin hiding in Russia. That should allow the normal military to head to Japan. Protect our precious citizens. You can handle this if we keep things simple, right?”

“Are you sending out soldiers while ignoring the chain of command!?”

Kanzaki’s eyes opened wide in shock.

The head of the Russian Orthodox Church was doing everything he could to control the situation beyond the glass. For better or for worse, not many people would be willing to act without his permission while in front of him like that.

But Vasilisa showed no concern.

“His biggest selling point is his purity. I don’t have to tell him about all the dirty jobs behind the scenes.”

Sasha, who wore binding clothes all over her body, lightly stroked the crowbar at her waist.

“You do have to. A question: do you really think I, a fellow member of the Russian Orthodox Church, will overlook a traitor?”

“Yes, yes. And my answer is the same as always: the results will prove who is-…gbh!?”

Vasilisa was cut off because Sasha unhesitatingly gave the crowbar a full swing toward her head. With a tremendous noise, Vasilisa’s upper body bent sideways at a right angle at about the waist. However, she recovered like a metronome and she never stopped smiling.

Even afterwards, Vasilisa continued smiling as if nothing had happened.

“Anyway, everyone go all out to crush Gremlin’s diversion team! Teach them that we’re the only magicians allowed to use the name of a fairy!!”

“You perverts,” muttered Kanzaki.

“A question: could you at least refer to me as a monster instead?” protested Sasha.

Part 2

Kamijou Touma lay on the top of the train’s roof as it rushed through the subway tunnel. He slowly stood up as the car unsteadily shook back and forth.

The train was made up of five different cars.

It was not even a hundred meters long.

As Kamijou clenched his right fist, the woman named Freyja who wore a maternity dress took two or three slow steps backwards. However, a smile could be seen on her face thanks to the slight illumination from the fluorescent lights that seemed to flow in the opposite direction of the train.

She was not running away.

She was not being forced back.

Most likely, that was the ideal distance for Freyja. She was preparing to attack. And once she had finished, the girl slowly swung her palm.

“Come forth, Brísingamen.”

Kamijou heard the sound of a hard object striking something.

At some point, a glowing jewel had appeared between her fingers.

“Cost 1. Black. Call / / Svaðilfari.”

Something occurred immediately afterwards.

As a single jewel shot into the air with a roar, what looked like red thread appeared and wrapped around it. That torrent of thread looked like a red tornado and it quickly compressed and tightened until it was solid. In the blink of an eye, it then twisted into the form of a giant red horse. It was a mass of kinetic energy made entirely out of powerful artificial muscles.

With a glittering jewel on its forehead, the giant horse gave a tremendous neigh and charged toward Kamijou.

Depending on the breed, even normal horses could weigh 400-500 kilograms. This horse was two or three sizes larger than that and it showed no concern over its head scraping against the tunnel ceiling that shot by at such high speed. If that thing struck a flesh-and-blood human, the human could easily be smashed to pieces.

However, Kamijou Touma’s right hand held a power called Imagine Breaker.

The strength of his opponent did not matter. All that mattered was that his opponent was supported by the supernatural power known as magic. He could then smash them to pieces with a single fist no matter who or what they were.

“Ohhhhhhh!!”

Kamijou stepped forward while desperately suppressing the desire to surrender to this giant horse that was even destroying the fluorescent lights on the tunnel roof as it advanced. He slammed his fist against the chest of the horse that looked more frightening than the bumper of a large truck.

The aggregation of tightened red thread burst like a balloon and disappeared into thin air.

Kamijou’s weapon was his fist, so he had to approach Freyja who was backing away.

However…

“Cost 1. White. Call / / Muninn.”

“Cost 1. White. Call / / Huginn.”

In the time it took Kamijou to destroy the giant horse, Freyja had already thrown two new jewels into the air. Red thread appeared from somewhere and wrapped around them. They transformed into two giant birds that charged at Kamijou from the right and left.

(Not good!!)

Kamijou had already grasped the overall situation.

But even so, he could not find an effective way out of it.

Freyja could produce monsters faster than Kamijou could destroy them. In the time it took him to defeat one, she would produce two. In the time it took him to smash two, she would bring forth four. In the time it took him to destroy four, she would create thirteen. Her mass production would continue on and on.

Freyja only needed to use the slight time she built up to repeat the same simple task over and over again.

It was similar to the summoners in RPGs, but Freyja had no more attachment to the monsters she used than to a projectile in a barrage.

Being on top of a train also helped her because Kamijou could not work his way around the monsters.

“Cost 1. Black. Call / / Ratatoskr.”

“Cost 1. Black. Call / / Hrungnir.”

“Cost 1. Black. Call / / Hymir.”

“Cost 1. Black. Call / / Þrymr.”

“Cost 1. Black. Call / / Svaðilfari.”

(My right hand isn’t enough. I’m going to be pushed back by this barrage!)

Three large, dark red men stood before him. Another giant horse stood with them. And a mass of muscles that looked like a squirrel chased after the others, causing them to charge in a frenzy toward Kamijou. It was not much different from having the quickly-rotating blades of a lawnmower or shield machine approaching him. They mowed down and cut down everything in their path as they advanced.

If Kamijou did not stop them, he would be smashed to pieces.

If he did stop them, twice as many monsters would rush at him.

Freyja's incantations would continue as long as it took to exceed Kamijou's ability to handle them.

It would continue until the overwhelming violence produced by those masses of muscle crushed that boy's skeleton.

The sound of something soft being squished reverberated loudly throughout the tunnel.

As it did, the fertility goddess Freyja let out a whistle.

She bent over and laughed while showing no concern for the large stomach pushing out her maternity dress.

"Ah ha ha!! Amazing. Simply amazing. I never thought you would crush my surefire method like that!"

"...!"

Kamijou's choice had been simple in concept.

He did not have time to crush each individual monster with Imagine Breaker, so he had given up on defeating all of them.

He had first stomped his foot down on the small squirrel-like animal driving the other monsters into a frenzy.

He then drove his right fist into one of the large men approaching, causing him to burst apart.

The other large men and the large horse had been packed in closely as they rushed forward, so they recoiled from the impact of the man exploding. During that time, Kamijou had slammed his full body weight into one of them with his shoulder. Normally, that giant body would not have budged, but it toppled because it was already off balance.

The rest fell like dominos.

The monsters fell from the quickly moving train and struck the ground rushing by down below.

That impact may not have been enough to destroy them, but it did not matter as long as they could not catch up.

Kamijou ran down the path created between him and Freyja.

Freyja responded by throwing a jewel.

“Cost 1. Black. Call / / Þrymr…Uh, oh.”

The pregnant woman with short, wavy hair bent her back and crouched down. Kamijou frowned slightly at that action that put pressure on her large belly, but then…

“Wah!?”

The large man “given birth to” by Freyja collapsed as if his head had been struck by a hammer. Seeing that, Kamijou finally caught on.

(The tunnel ceiling just got a lot lower!!)

He crouched down as quickly as he could.

The top half of the large man’s head had been crushed, he lost his balance, and he fell off the train and onto the ground.

Freyja giggled while still bent over.

Despite the darkness, she somehow had an accurate grasp of how high up the ceiling was. She straightened her back once more and scattered a large number of jewels.

(I won’t let her recover here!!)

Kamijou sprang up from his crouching position and ran forward.

Meanwhile, Freyja repeated the same incantation.

“Cost 1. Black. Call / / Þrymr.”

“Cost 1. Black. Call / / Þrymr.”

“Cost 1. Black. Call / / Þrymr.”

“Cost 1. Black. Call / / Þrymr.”

She sent forth a barrage that seemed to nullify all of Kamijou’s efforts thus far.

Multiple large men appeared.

However, the variation from before was gone. That may have shown she did not have the leeway for creativity now that Kamijou had approached.

And when the exact same type of monster charged down a limited route with the exact same movement pattern, Kamijou had a much easier time dealing with them. They did not fly around like birds and ignore the footing. They did not crawl along the walls of the train like snakes and circle around behind him. If they all charged at him at once, he would have an easier time of causing another domino effect.

And if he could break through that wall…

"I can reach her."

Kamijou tightly clenched his right first.

He charged toward the large men himself.

"I *will* reach you, Freyja!!"

However, Freyja grinned in her maternity dress and flicked a single jewel up with her thumb.

She gave the incantation.

"Cost 1. White. Call / / Hildisvíni."

As she spoke, dark red thread produced a boar behind the men and closer to Freyja. Kamijou was cautious, but it was smaller than the men. And more importantly, the men filled up so much of the limited space on the train that the boar would not be able to move properly. Once he began the domino effect, the boar would be struck by the other monsters before it could reach him. If it fell to the ground, that was the end of it. But even if it remained on the roof, he could destroy it with Imagine Breaker while it could not move. Either way, it would not be much of an obstacle.

Or so he thought.

It turned out he was wrong.

Freyja pointed her index finger forwards and made an announcement.

"*Eat them!!*"

Kamijou heard an unpleasant sound similar to something wet bursting.

The boar at the back mercilessly bit into one of the large men that had his back turned to it. A crunching chewing sound followed. The aggregation of dark red thread wrapped around the boar and the boar even took in the jewel. The boar's silhouette grew by one size.

"*Cost 2*. White. Shift / / Hildisvíni."

(Not good.)

Kamijou could instinctually tell this was bad.

He could not let that boar continue to eat those men. He had a feeling the situation would change in some definitive way if it got any larger. He had to eliminate the boar's food before that happened!

"*Cost 3*. White. Shift / / Hildisvíni!"

"*Cost 4*. White. Shift / / Hildisvíni!!"

"*Cost 5*. White. Shift / / Hildisvíni!!!!!!"

But he was too late.

He had miscalculated. Each time the boar known as Hildisvíni grew, its mouth and stomach grew, so the time needed to swallow one of the men lowered. By the time Kamijou tried to defeat one of the giants, all of the "food" was already within the boar's stomach.

"Norse mythology is a mythology of mutual destruction. It was set up from the beginning so over 99% of the gods and their enemies would die while fighting each other. By constructing a spell that accentuates that fact, I can create an attack that allows good and evil, white and black to devour each other!"

And…

The boar had grown so large that it almost crushed the train car below it. It seemed to fill the entire half circle space of the tunnel. Its body was constantly scraping against the walls rushing by at high speed, but it did not seem to be taking damage. In fact, the tunnel was noticeably being destroyed.

Kamijou naturally thrust his right hand forward.

(The number of enemies has decreased. This is my chance! If I can defeat any monster in a single strike, the strength of that monster doesn't matter. I just have to blow away this boar with my right hand and charge for Freyja!!)

"Ah ha ha!!" laughed Freyja. Not even the top of her hair was visible from behind the giant boar. "Are you forcibly trying to motivate yourself? That isn't gonna work. After all, this is the child I, fertility goddess Freyja, have given birth to. Now that it's grown up to Cost 5, your mental state isn't going to change anything."

"Child…?" muttered Kamijou as he felt a great tension from that special phrasing.

One big reason behind his question came from his desire to look away from the very real danger before him.

But Freyja continued speaking.

“Yes. I am not calling these children in from some other place. I am creating them myself. I guide my magic power through the womb to give it a specific directionality of germination, I pour that magic power into a Brísingamen jewel, and I create a completely different design using that jewel as the core☆”

Kamijou then heard a sound similar to rustling silk.

Freyja may have been rubbing at her stomach.

Kamijou may have been able to guess that, but the words she spoke next exceeded anything he had imagined.

“But I suppose this child is the same. Ah ha ha! My own magical sense is hopelessly lacking. I had no choice but to borrow this child’s brain and body to use magic.”

“Damn you…”

“After being trapped in here for two full years, not even I really know what’s going on *in here*. Ah ha ha. I’m not sure how to say it. Maybe it’s like when a leftover has been sitting in the back of fridge for a looooong time and you’re afraid to check on it.”

“What do you think a human life is!?”

“Or maybe it’s just that thinking about it wouldn’t do any good.”

Just as she said that, the giant boar that filled the entire empty space of the tunnel attacked like an approaching wall.

“Ah…”

No matter how powerful the opponent, Kamijou had assumed he could manage as long as he could slam Imagine Breaker into it before it could attack.

In fact, the larger the target, the easier it was to hit. This could even be called a chance to make a comeback. Even as he forced himself to think positively like that, he tried to stop his trembling body.

He had been completely wrong.

As the boar charged, Kamijou’s feet floated up from the train’s roof and he was blown backwards.

When a subway train arrived at the platform, an odd gust of wind blew through the station. The large mass of the train passing through that sealed space pushed the air like a piston.

The giant boar named Hildisvíni did the same.

It had grown so large it filled the entire upper portion of the tunnel and scraped against the concrete tunnel walls. What would happen if that giant form charged straight forward with tremendous speed? Naturally, a mass of air with nowhere to escape would be sent straight into Kamijou.

(You're kidding… That can happen even on top of a running train!? Does that boar have some strange ability to draw in the air around it!?)

"Gh…!?"

He subconsciously flailed his arms and legs around, but it had little effect in midair.

In midair with no footing, he could not even change the orientation of his body.

And…

Hildisvíni continued charging toward Kamijou at an even greater speed than he flew backwards. If he continued to be pushed by that explosive gust of wind, he would be knocked off the back of the train. If the giant boar touched him, he would be changed into a pile of flesh more gruesome than if he was hit by a train.

(Is there…)

Kamijou's throat grew dry as that giant form approached.

Even as alarm bells rang in his head like sparks from a short, he tried to think up some way out of this.

(Is there no way to overcome this!?)

Part 3

"Ugh…"

In London at night, a muscular man with a messy beard groaned at a bar on the outskirts of the city.

He was Misaka Tabigake.

He was Misaka Misuzu's husband and Misaka Mikoto's father.

He sat at a table on one end of the dimly-lit bar, opened the kind of unrefined laptop used at public construction sites, and called someone using a satellite phone.

A number of windows were open on the computer, but they all said "transactions suspended" in various languages.

"Hey, hey. I finally get started with that undersea water pipe project connecting the southern tip of Spain to North Africa and everywhere has suspended transactions! How am I supposed to bid for construction contractors now? What's going on!?"

"Preparations for war, president. Iron, copper, rare earths, and jewels. Instead of making proper deals, the influential people have decided to get rich selling everything valuable until the world passes the boiling point. All the contact points have been closed up and they won't open again until this crazed excitement is over."

"Do you have any idea what the self-sufficiency rate for food is!? If both sides stop trading, everyone will dry up before that get rich quick scheme pays off!!"

"Don't look at me. Honestly, I want to get out of Africa. It's only thirty kilometers to Europe. You should be grateful I'm making an effort to stay put."

Despite what the person on the other end of the phone said, he did not seem all that troubled.

That showed just how much experience he had in that continent of hot sand.

"More importantly, Misaka-san, should you really be in London right now? I hear Tokyo, Japan has become a battlefield. What kind of father doesn't rush off to save his family?"

"I tried every method I could think of. All the airlines have shut down and I can't use my connection with the RAF. My calls and emails aren't getting through. I went back to working on this job because nothing worked."

"It scares me how you mentioned the air force so casually there."

"I tried getting a civilian space trip, too. You know, one of those things that gets you in space after only thirty seconds of ballistic flight. But that didn't pan out either. Everyone is in a complete panic over this imaginary war. No matter how much I say I'll pay with my black card in hand, they say they don't want to send anything into the air during these unstable circumstances. ...Damn. Maybe I should buy a Soviet warplane from the European mafia. My personal funds should be enough for an unarmed long-distance reconnaissance plane."

“I get it, I get it. You care for your family to a reckless degree! If I wasn’t holding your reins, you’d probably split the planet in half. I get it, so let’s focus on our work.”

Tabigake brought a hand to his forehead when he heard the voice coming from the satellite phone.

He took a long, slow breath and consciously calmed his heart rate.

“Gwaaah!! I can’t stand it! I’m returning to Japan right this instant!! There has to be some way. I know! I could buy an old ballistic missile and climb inside as the payload!!”

“You haven’t calmed down at all!! You wouldn’t survive that even if you wore a spacesuit!”

Part 4

A single small boat floated under the sun in the chilly waters of the Pacific Ocean.

The small boat seemed to be made of wood and might have appeared charming had it been floating in a pond at a park. But with only water visible in all 360 degrees, it gave the more sinister image of being stranded.

A girl in a dress stood in the boat.

The dress may have originally been as pure white as a wedding dress, but more than a third of it was stained red and black as if splattered in her enemies’ blood.

And the same was true for the girl herself.

Her skin had stiches running in every direction like a battered stuffed animal that had been repeatedly repaired. And when the skin had been grafted onto her, it appeared there had been little concern over the moisture. Some of her skin had the youthfulness of a young girl’s skin, some of it was as wrinkled as an old woman, and some of it was discolored a dark blue. This added to the cobbled together impression she gave off.

“Here they are,” she said as lightly as someone who had spotted the person they were waiting for in front of a train station.

The girl casually pulled out a small kitchen knife and threw it toward the ocean surface.

The change only took a few seconds.

The ocean water for over a hundred kilometers around the small boat completely froze into a thick layer of ice.

The girl in the bloody dress took an elegant step onto the ocean surface that looked like a lake during winter. The ice palace reassuringly welcomed the girl with a hard sound. The girl smoothly walked across the ice like she was being escorted by the hand of a well-mannered noble.

Several military ships had their path blocked by the sudden appearance of the ice.

It was as if a special chemical had been used to harden the oil in a wok with scraps of vegetables still inside. And the ice did not stop at the fleet on the ocean. The ocean was likely frozen all the way to nearby Saipan.

“Wars are not only fought by the super heroes wielding machine guns. If one crushes the supply ships and their routes, the super heroes’ supply of ammunition will dry up,” muttered the girl in a dress with the lightheartedness of someone reading back their shopping list.

The supply ships had several escort ships with them and were armed with autocannons themselves.

Even if they did not understand the details of magic, they at least understood that the instant large-scale freezing of the ocean had occurred with that small boat in the center.

A deep voice gave a warning in English using the speakers meant to communicate with pirates.

“Stay where you are! Immediately disarm yourself and put your hands up. If we determine you are a threat, we will fire!!”

“You have plenty of weapons to drive off pirates, blow up cruise missiles, and shoot down planes, but you have nothing ideal for killing a delicate maiden, do you? I suppose I should commend you for hesitating to tear me to pieces.”

Her voice remained carefree.

And she continued.

“The queen of Niflheimr can draw out a location’s causes of death.”

Lights appeared.

And not just around the girl in a dress. Small candle-like flames floated up over the entire one-hundred kilometer area of frozen ocean. They numbered in the hundreds, thousands, or even tens of thousands.

The girl raised her index finger and scooped up one of the candle-like lights.

She brought it to her lips.

And she breathed something in.

“Analyzing the residual information of the death. Arnold Mackenzie, male, 24 at time of death. While taking a trip on a cruiser, an acquaintance aboard questioned him about a romantic relationship. It developed into a fight and he was stuffed head first into the oven in the kitchen space. He died of shock due to the intense pain of burns all over his body. …Oh? I wonder if he had any relation to Freyja.”

She tilted her head and reached for the chest of her dress.

She pulled out a shiny black revolver.

The supply ship immediately reacted to this obvious weapon.

“She has a weapon! All crew on deck, stay on your guard!!”

“Throw the gun away within five seconds or we will assume you are hostile and-…!!”

The voice suddenly stopped.

A high-pitched sound similar to feedback came through the speaker and the girl stopped moving for a moment.

Finally, a new female voice spoke over the speaker.

“We quieted down those men who don’t know how this works. It was very childish of you to use such a large spell on people who know nothing of magic. How about we actually enjoy a fight between experts?”

“Wait. I’m not the type to enjoy fighting,” said another female voice over the speaker.

The girl in the bloody dress tilted her head so far one began to worry she would snap her neck.

And she spoke.

“Who are you?”

“I am Silvia and this is Brunhild Eiktobel. Simply put, we’re your enemies.”

“Fine then.”

Without hesitating, the patched-together girl pulled the revolver’s trigger.

With a dry gunshot, a highly deadly .45 caliber bullet was fired, but it was no match for the mass of steel that was the ship. It would do nothing more than scatter a few orange sparks and make a sound similar to a pot being struck.

That was all it should have done.

That was the common knowledge of the world.

And yet…

With a great roar, the entire steel supply ship was enveloped in crimson flames.

Nothing had been ignited.

Even if all the fuel stockpiled aboard the supply ship had caught fire, the flames would not have spread so evenly. It would have instead exploded at a single point, breaking the ship in two.

The unnatural flames had been caused by the girl in the bloody dress.

“I can draw out causes of death from the residual information of the dead, store them in existing weapons, and *swap out the causes of death*. I can strangle you with a sword, drown you with a train, crush you with a blowtorch, and burn you with a handgun. That is a suitable reason to bear the name of Hel, the queen of Niflheimr who rules over the dead.”

When the ship had been struck by Hel’s bullet, it had been heated all over as if it had been “stuffed head first into an oven”. Everyone aboard, be they expert or amateur, soldier or magician, would be roasted like turkeys.

However…

A sound like shattering glass exploded out.

The flames enveloping the supply ship were suddenly blown away and the ship appeared unscathed from within.

It was similar to peeling away sunburned skin. The supply ship’s exterior was actually a bit shinier than before.

A woman’s voice came from the speaker as if nothing had happened.

“Sorry, but barriers are my specialty. If you want to kill the crew of this ship, you’ll have to take care of me first.”

“I see,” was the girl named Hel’s only response.

She spread her arms to show off the candle-like flames scattered as far across the icy ground as the eye could see.

“Ten thousand fifty three causes of death have appeared here in all. As expected of a location deeply related to the world’s largest gun nation, many people have died here. …I will use all of these to kill you. And if I kill you, I will use your cause of death somewhere.”

“Hel, hm?” said the other female voice. It was a bored-sounding voice. “People once called me Hel. I never thought I would run across an idiot who proudly showed off the sinister name of that queen of the underworld.”

“Now you have my interest.”

“Not mine. Let’s just get this over with.”

Part 5

Misaka Mikoto held Index who held the calico cat. While in that matryoshka doll-like situation, Academy City’s #3 Level 5 used magnetism to jump from wall to wall of the high-rise buildings.

Orange sparks floated down from nowhere shortly after they passed through. A long, long line of those sparks trailed after them.

At first, Mikoto had repelled each and every one of them, but she had quickly learned they could not move quickly enough to pursue her. If she jumped away in the time it took the sparks to transform into pillars of fire and then flame figures, they would lose sight of their target and disappear.

Once she knew that, she saw no point in wasting her time shooting at them.

She manipulated great magnetic power more quickly and precisely in order to jump from building to building.

Either due to the magnetism, the speed, or the height, the cat fiercely struggled. This stabbed at Mikoto’s heart.

“Where are we anyway? Is this Sendagaya or Yotsuya? Damn, if only I could use my phone’s GPS.”

“How am I supposed to know?”

“Are you useful for anything!?”

Academy City was technically a part of Tokyo, but it was surrounded by large walls and one could not come and go freely. That was why Mikoto had a poor sense of the area. She was boldly travelling through the air based on the vague idea that she would reach Tokyo bay as long as she continued east.

“No matter where we go, the surface is covered in people. Is that idiot really trying to break through the center of all that? He could be crushed or…”

She trailed off.

Multiple giant aircraft had flown by quite nearby while clustered together and seemingly competing with each other.

A tremendous blast of air sent Mikoto’s body into a harsh spin despite her magnetic support. She concentrated entirely on the bottom of her left foot and focused on controlling her body.

She finally fixed herself in position by pressing her foot against a sign sticking out from a wall.

“What…was that!?”

On one side was a next generation fighter from Academy City. It was clearly different from the fighters people usually thought of that were approximately twenty meters long. This huge fighter was easily seventy or eighty meters long. The maneuverability and turning that was needed for the swift movements of a fighter were all forced through with trajectory alterations carried out by the engine. In fact, it overwhelmed other fighters in those regards. This was the monster that had swept across the battlefields of Russia.

Just that fighter which could achieve a top speed of 7,000 kph would have been surprising enough.

(Academy City has finally begun a rampage in the skies of Tokyo!?)

However, a different shadow flew in the sky as well.

It was less than thirty meters long, but it was not made of metal or composite materials.

It looked like an eagle.

It had no feathers. Its entire body was a mass of muscles formed from tightened wet red thread. It flapped its wings to travel at acute angles with supersonic speeds. When one side fired an air-to air missile filled with precision electronics, the other side would complexly move its giant wings to produce a spear-like gust of wind to knock the missile out of the air. It would sometimes use the wind to throw the explosive back at the pursuing fighter.

“That’s Hræsvelgr,” said Index while she held the cat and Mikoto held her. “That is the great eagle that devours the dead in Norse mythology. It is so large that flapping its wings creates all of the wind throughout the world. Gremlin took portions of that legend to create this.”

Mikoto did not understand what that meant, but the sight before her eyes was overwhelming.

Multiple explosions occurred in midair. Two giant forms weaved through the gaps and repeatedly attacked each other and evaded. A spear-like gust of wind was fired and the giant fighter flipped over and just barely avoided it. The fighter then fired a missile but more like it was placing it in the air than aiming and firing.

The surrounding explosive blasts and spear-like gusts of wind knocked the un-ignited missile around like a pinball. It flew through a complex trajectory before dropping down.

And it fell directly in front of the giant eagle known as Hræsvelgr.

The explosive blast was filled with a wet sound that had been absent previously.

The mass of muscles had lost its head and…

“It’s falling!!” shouted Mikoto.

Instead of a building-lined street overflowing with people, it fell toward a wide open space that was either a park or a sports field. Thick trees were snapped apart as easily as a bundle of pasta before putting it in the boiling water and a large cloud of dust rose into the air.

The lack of screams led Mikoto to assume no one had been there. The massive flood of people was formed from the people stalled after losing any means of transportation. People were still not trying to evacuate, so they had not yet started to gather in the parks.

Or at least, Mikoto hoped that was the case.

Watching from where she was would change nothing and remaining still would allow the orange sparks to surround her.

Mikoto thought as she once more travelled from building to building with magnetism.

(Academy City and this Gremlin group are both seriously planning to fight here. But do they really understand what that means? If they set up a defensive line in such a densely populated area, who knows how many people will be dragged into this!?)

♦

The situation had developed in an even odder direction.

As Birdway, Lessar, and Kumokawa Maria travelled through the sewer to reach the river, they were forced to walk through the sewer all the way from Shinjuku to the Takadanobaba area. After exiting into a river, they had stolen a small boat as planned. However, the river was only knee deep. They had obtained a dark rubber boat. Kumokawa Maria did not know enough to tell it was a JSDF military landing boat with an engine attached on the back.

“You’re going to return it with a message card later, right?”

“I can have a certain president replace it for them. That should make a good memory for most anyone.”

The tiller attached to the engine at the back of the rubber boat was being operated by a 12-year-old blonde girl, but no one challenged them. It was obvious to everyone that this was not the time to worry about that.

“That bridge is about to collapse,” commented Kumokawa Maria from the front of the boat as they passed under a small bridge covered in people.

Lessar’s nose began to twitch from where she sat next to her.

“I sense an odd presence.”

“You too?” said Birdway without turning around. “Academy City and Gremlin have finally collided. Everything was limited to the air before, but a few pieces of wreckage have crashed into Tokyo. The looks on the people’s faces have changed. They’re changing from simple dissatisfaction to panic and fear.”

However, there was nothing those three girls could do.

The phone and internet lines were overloaded and they had no way of speaking to all of the people at once. And even if they did, they could not think of anything to say which would calm them down in this situation.

Dissatisfaction held much more energy than people thought it did.

It was more difficult to understand than the more obvious emotions, but that meant it was difficult to defend against. It could cause a real change in people’s mental activity.

When a leader controlled a single administration, he needed to detect the quantity and quality of the people's dissatisfaction and establish a means of reducing it before it exceeded the tolerable limits. That showed just how important it was.

And the quality of that dissatisfaction was changing.

The stabbing sensation approaching from every direction was likely anger.

Birdway gave a sneer and spoke.

"Those damn pacifists have turned their anger toward Academy City."

"Why? Gremlin is the one attacking. That dogfight just now only happened because Gremlin targeted a foolish passenger plane that didn't change its course during this emergency situation. Academy City's supersonic fighters may look flashy, but all they're doing is trying to intercept Gremlin's attacks!"

"They aren't observing this so calmly." Lessar dragged over the cooler sitting in one corner of the military rubber boat. "The normal people will know some strange creatures had been flying around until now, but they weren't attacking. It was only once Academy City interfered that they started going on a rampage."

"And so Academy City is the villain? That's no different than ignoring the hornet's nest on the eaves of your house."

"This is part of their distribution of what people stand to gain," readily replied Birdway. "Doing the right thing but having the majority mad at you is not fun on the political side of things. I doubt that's enough to break Academy City, but it should at least slightly dull the decision making ability of those on the scene. And Gremlin's plan doesn't end here. They're trying to tangle up hundreds of threads to bind everyone from multiple directions. Understanding even a bit of the structure is enough to know how unpleasant this is."

Part 6

A bubbling sound could be heard.

Sargasso contained the remains of a luxury passenger ship. On the deck of the giant rusted ship was a giant rectangular pool.

It was filled with a thick, transparent liquid. It seemed to be at quite a high temperature because the air bubbles of a boiling liquid floated up here and there. Perhaps due to the stickiness of the original liquid, it looked like a monster's gastric juices or a dark swamp with a corpse submerged in it.

No one would have thought it had originally been pure gold.

In the Norse areas, gold was both a symbol of wealth and the material used for the weapons of the gods. After Gremlin had concentrated all of their techniques into extracting the weapon material side of its meaning, the gold had already lost its chemical properties and meaning. People from the science side would have hesitated to even refer to it as “gold”.

Three girls stood on the poolside: Magic God Othinus, Dvergr Marian Slingeneyer, and Mjölnir who took the form of a drum.

They were all central members of Gremlin who were focused on producing Gungnir which could control and stabilize the power of a magic god which was too powerful to use properly. However, they were not constantly and unendingly uttering incantations.

“So this is what it’s like once it begins,” said the eyepatch-wearing girl.

“Igniting it is the hard part. This girl here did a good job of taking in and controlling the volcanic energy we acquired in Hawaii. We should only have to wait now.”

Marian traced her fingertips across the surface of the black drum and the girl who had been given that form shook happily.

Most people would associate the name Mjölnir with the weapon of the Lightning God Thor. It had immense power, it would pursue and directly hit its target when thrown, and it would return to its owner like a boomerang. However, it was exceedingly heavy and could only be used by the “chosen one”. That was the standard image.

But just as Thor was originally an almighty god in charge of the weather, terrain, and farming, the hammer that symbolized his power was a convenient tool that could be used for many different tasks. It could be viewed like a magic wand.

Even after *Thor’s abilities were limited to those of the lightning god*, that hammer retained the vestiges of his power over farming. Thor could eat the goats he owned and they would return to normal with just a wave of the hammer.

Mjölnir was a spiritual item that could be used for anything.

It was a joker that let one pass over a single hole in any experiment.

Putting it that way showed just how rare an existence that drum girl was. She was so rare the entire magic side could easily fight a war over that single girl.

“Now that it’s started, we only have to watch the process. We only need to interfere if we decide a manual recovery is needed.”

“Are you saying I should go take a nap? At the very last, I will not let my guard down until it passes *that stage*.”

“Ha ha. Othinus, I’m surprised a magic god like you can still get nervous.”

“This is not an issue with my abilities. This world is unskilled and untrustworthy.”

That stage.

There was one obstacle they could not overcome even with a magical joker that let them fill in a single inadequacy.

They knew the lance could never be completed with the existing techniques of the magic side. Mjölnir could fill in any one magical symbol, but only within the field of magic. Mjölnir could do nothing when any kind of magic was useless.

To fill in that deficiency, they had stolen the power of the science side.

Specifically, a holistic esper.

The remnants of Academy City’s #2 had been forced to create a specimen in the form of a girl and Kihara Kagun had made some alterations to that specimen. They now had a truly unique disposable item.

Othinus would occasionally use the Einherjar who sat on the line between living and dead, so she knew the truth of the matter. That specimen was not an object created from a living human. It was a human-shaped object that had been altered. It was a soulless existence.

“What we are doing is essentially a magical ceremony,” said Othinus. “But it cannot be completed solely with magic. In other words, the automatic work will stall somewhere. To accurately throw in the holistic esper and continue the ceremony with the proper timing, it needs to be switched over manually.”

“I remember a toy where you had to rearrange the rails a train was travelling along so it wouldn’t derail. I guess this is similar.”

A bubbling sound could be heard.

Something was visible at the bottom of the pool.

It was a cylinder as thick as a 500 yen coin and as long as a ballpoint pen.

That was the bottom of a lance.

“How long is it supposed to be?”

“250. …It will grow quickly once it begins.”

Part 7

“Chehh… I can only access the disaster message board service. Well, it’s not like I could rush there even if I could contact them.”

A middle-aged man in a shabby suit and with a slight beard spoke in an exhausted voice.

His name was Kamijou Touya.

He was the father of a certain high school student.

He was a foreign capital salaryman who was on trips to other countries year round.

He was currently in America. Specifically, he was in a characteristic designer’s building in the center of Silicon Valley. However, his thoughts were completely focused on Japan.

His wife Shiina lived in the 23 special wards of Tokyo.

His son Touma lived in Academy City.

The area they both lived in had fallen into complete panic. As a father, he could not help but be worried.

From the simple sites he could browse on his phone, it seemed all of the airlines had shut down reservations for flights. It was not that all the flights were full. Instead, they were refusing to send out passenger planes when the safety of the air was not confirmed.

Something was happening in Tokyo.

No, that was only the tip of the iceberg. That was only the part that showed up the most.

Touya’s expertise in finances showed him the greater confusion lurking below the surface.

“Sorry about the wait.”

A voice as high pitched as a whistle filled the reception space. It belonged to a young girl.

Touya frantically put his phone in his pocket and stood up from his seat. A blonde girl not even ten years old had entered.

Her name was Lindy Blueshake.

After the fall of the Data Queen of the United States, Olay Blueshake, this girl had inherited her “kingdom”. She was the new queen that controlled a large pillar supporting the value of the United States and its currency, the dollar, by controlling the world’s largest search engine and several other internet services.

During the incident in Hawaii, rumors had spread of the corporation's bankruptcy and dissolution, but it seemed the people had not wanted to see such a convenient service disappear. It was now back in business thanks to the support of several financial investment companies.

For example, Kamijou Touya's parent company.

Lindy trotted over to the table with a gait that made one think she should be wearing colorful rain boots.

"Um, I have looked over the paperwork. I just have to sign here, right?" she asked.

"Well, yes. …Excuse me, but did you read over it at least three times? I know it is odd to say this as the one making the proposal, but this kind of contract usually has some king of cruel wording hidden inside it."

"D-don't worry! I read over it with my lawyers and accountants!"

It seemed she was not giving much thought to the possibility of opposing factions or bought industrial spies within her own company.

Touya suddenly wanted to explain the basic workings of the world to Lindy, but the large man standing behind her lightly cleared his throat.

He was a tanned and muscular man with sunglasses completely hiding his eyes. The black suit did not suit him. In fact, it was the wrong size. It looked like it would rip in places if he started running.

Touya guessed he was a native Hawaiian and the man spoke with a voice as deep as one would expect.

"There is no problem. We have a system for revealing corrupt personnel."

"Very well then. …It is not our problem if your group begins to decline because of this."

"????"

Lindy looked puzzled and Touya exchanged a quick glance with the large man wearing sunglasses.

He watched that young hand sign the documents on top of the reception space table.

As Lindy moved her hand, she spoke.

"Does it bother you?"

"What? Well, um…"

“The situation in Tokyo.”

Touya gave a bitter smile at how readily she said that.

Lindy continued her struggle against the many documents.

“Specialists like us can tell right away when communications are overloaded in an area.”

“Ha ha. It looks like it is difficult to hide anything from you.”

“But it is strange. Using the internet normally should not overload it to such an extreme. Unless everyone in Japan took simultaneous action to overload it, information should not be cut off so cleanly for a localized area.”

“Are you saying someone or something is guiding this large flow of events?”

As Touya answered, a different piece of information passed through the back of his mind.

The New York Stock Exchange, the London Stock Exchange, the Shanghai Stock Exchange, the Berlin Stock Exchange, and the Indonesia Stock Exchange. This information dealt with the flow of money and objects.

(Iron, steel, car, and aircraft stock as well as the standard futures in oil and grains. Those hasty people are buying and selling everything like a war is starting. And all of the deals are ones that will pay off if the confusion grows.)

“Does it bother you?” she asked again.

Touya raised his head to find Lindy continuing to battle the paperwork.

He could not tell how much she knew.

The eyes of a child could sometimes see through the deception of adults with a special kind of instinct and logic. Touya viewed her comment as just as dangerous as women’s intuition.

“There seem to be a fair number of people who would be happy if this commotion dragged on for a while.”

“Um…”

“If one gathers and analyzes search results, SNS posts, and message board posts, one can create a graph of the world’s trends. It gives a logical framework for what is known as big data. Anyway, it seems that arrow is pointed in quite a dangerous direction.”

(What an unpleasant age we live in.)

Touya kept that thought from showing on his face.

Instead, he spoke.

“In the financial world, there are plenty of people known as traders of death. However, it is more than just the specialists this time. We are catching glimpses of innocent young men and housewife day traders who want this confusion to continue.”

“It appears that some hints have been left to ensure those people voluntarily think that way.”

“Do you not know who exactly left those hints?”

“Big data does not collect information that would allow us to specify individuals. Once we do that, it becomes a spying and eavesdropping system. …That is what my mother did.”

If someone was making posts online to foster this confusion, could their location be used to search out the source behind all of it?

(No…)

Touya rejected his own idea.

(The true agitator will have manipulated complete strangers to make those posts. The true villain does not commit evil deeds where anyone can see them. I doubt they would remain in the kind of location anyone would think to check.)

“By the way,” said Lindy as her fountain pen raced along the final document. “If we use the packet pattern file structure of the Japan-America hotline connecting the White House to the prime minister’s residence, we should be able to break through the overloaded line network with a top priority VoIP connection. Want to try it?”

“I wouldn’t care if it got me arrested, but I can’t have my wife charged on some national crime.”

Part 8

Repeated sounds of solid objects being destroyed rang out.

Those were the sounds of the giant boar Hildisvíni charging toward the back of the train while destroying the fluorescent lights and other objects on the walls and ceiling of the tunnel. The boar was only a temporary mass of flesh, so it did not possess the standard instincts of a living creature. It ran right off the back of the train and the crash of the track being crushed burst out.

The maternity dress-wearing magician named Freyja gave a long sigh.

Nothing remained on top of the train's roof and Hildisvíni had not been destroyed by Imagine Breaker. After being thrown into the air, Kamijou Touma had either been crushed by the giant boar or thrown to the side and fallen to the ground.

Either way, he was certainly dead.

With her job done, Freyja reached into the pocket of her maternity dress and pulled out a communication spiritual item with several runes burned into it.

"Now then. I've crushed my top priority, so now I can go to the location of the next greatest problem. Let's see, the Muspell destruction report list says…"

Just as she began carelessly muttering to herself, she heard an ominous creaking noise.

"…"

At some point, a glowing jewel had appeared between her five fingers.

She looked toward the source of the sound.

It was quite nearby. It was on the edge of the train's roof. While looking to the front of the train, it was on the right.

She saw what looked like fingers.

No.

They were fingers. There were five of them. Someone was holding onto the quickly-moving train with just the strength of their hand.

She peered over at this person and realized who it was.

It was Kamijou Touma.

"Well done."

Freyja grinned and began to release the jewel in her fingers.

But before she could, Kamijou used his free arm to swing around the coat of his school uniform by the sleeve. He had removed it in advance.

The powerful wind caused the cloth to swell out and it covered Freyja's entire face.

It robbed her of her vision.

She lost her vision while peering down from the edge of the train.

Part 9

There was one more.

A young man named Fenrir walked through a dark snowy plain in Alaska.

During the night in the Arctic, the air was cold enough to feel like a deadly weapon, but the young man showed no sign of caring. He was like a wolf walking through the snow.

“Is this the way to the secret NORAD base known for ballistic missile defense?”

Ultimately, the most effective means of stopping the allied force was to seal off their intelligence network. In the modern age, intelligence killed more people than bullets. It could be military satellites, the internet, or anything else. If all of those communication methods were cut off, the globe that seemed so small would quickly return to being a vast planet. The more countries and people involved, the more area that had to be understood. And the more area that had to be understood, the more serious the effects of losing coordination.

While walking through a conifer forest covered in white snow, Fenrir came across a rope stretched out between the trees. The rope had an upside-down triangular cloth attached and that cloth had a skull mark in the center.

It seemed the area ahead was a minefield, but Fenrir ignored the warning and continued on.

After walking a little further, the forest suddenly ended and he could see a large space surrounded by a chain-link fence.

It was a radar base with a large number of parabolic antennae inside.

“Does the weight of the snow not break the dishes?”

After uttering that surprised comment, Fenrir heard a noise from the surrounding trees.

He narrowed his eyes slightly.

Immediately afterwards, all of the thick trees in the area were sliced in two at waist height.

It seemed to have been a long blade using wind or something similar.

The blade had been several dozen meters long and it had been created by a single card ripped from a set of flashcards held together by a metal ring. The card said “Wind Symbol” in yellow writing.

This was known as Shorthand.

It was a disposable grimoire developed by a certain female courier. The structure that allowed an original grimoire to automatically send out spells had been extracted and weaponized.

However…

“Stop that.”

The traces of damage were interrupted around where Fenrir stood.

A different color was mixed into the pure white of the snow. A number of black cracks had appeared as if space itself had been directly torn. One of those had “bitten” the wind blade.

“I don’t even need my canine teeth for this. If I release just my central incisors or lateral incisors, I can tear you to pieces right away.”

The sound of something breaking rang out.

The wind blade did not disappear or break. It was swallowed.

The cracks disappeared like the surface of clay being smoothed over with water. That long blade was swallowed up by those disappearing black cracks as if it was water being sucked down the drain of a pool.

The young man turned around.

He calmly observed the glamorous blond courier named Oriana Thomson.

“Don’t be so afraid. This is just a trick. It’s not like I’m damaging another phase and throwing it into heaven or hell. Not even I can do that.”

“Then what are those cracks?”

“It’s simple. I distort the flow of power a bit.” The young man shrugged. “Eastern feng shui is the same. The existence of mountains and rivers changes the flow of energy through ley lines and the like. In that case, you can create a ‘ditch’ that draws in the surrounding energy by creating a new mountain or river. It’s the same as how the rainwater will naturally flow toward an irrigation canal and be swallowed up.”

Fenrir was the beast that would devour Odin during the final battle of Ragnarök. The gods had feared him and so bound him and stabbed a sword into his mouth through the lower jaw so he could not close his mouth. When they had, the drool that had flowed from Fenrir's giant maw had created a large river.

He had used that legend.

By incorporating the same symbols as a river into a location, he created a large "ditch" that swallowed up the massive power of the ley lines. It forcibly swallowed up the magic power that constructed magic and swept it away.

In response, Oriana Thomson lightly spun the set of flashcards in her hand.

And she spoke.

"This is not my first time doing it with an enemy of magic. I have yet to use them on that boy, but I have simulated some countermeasures."

"Oh, you mean that right hand? All I do is have the magic swept away. I can't completely annihilate the occult, so I can't take on the exaggerated role of being a reference point for the world."

The space around Fenrir grew distorted.

Several black cracks appeared.

"But with this, I can drag in plenty of other things along with the massive amount of energy. You could say it's like sucking a human down the drain of a pool."

Part 10

Even on Tokyo Bay, repeated earthquake-like rumbling noises could be felt vibrating in one's gut.

A few more Hræsvelgrs that Fertility Goddess Freyja had given birth to ahead of time flew from Gremlin's base of Sargasso.

That base was only a few dozen kilometers from Academy City which was sending out bombers and fighters which could fly at 7,000 kph. It was even possible a shell fired from within the city's thick walls could fly in a large parabola and strike Sargasso.

Lightning God Thor (or rather, Ollerus disguised as Thor) stood directly on the ocean, listening to the rumbling.

Technically, he was standing on a large amount of goat fur he had scattered on the ocean surface. Needless to say, this was a spell constructed using the symbols of the goats that pulled Thor's chariot.

A disguise could be a lot of work.

(Now then. Everyone knows Sargasso is in Tokyo Bay, so there is no more need for me to remain within Gremlin. To reduce the danger from Academy City's attack or Magic God Othinus tearing me apart if my cover is blown, I should leave here right away. On the other hand…)

He heard a great roar overhead that was deeper than the distant explosions.

It came from Mökkurkalfe.

That giant was known as "mountain-like" and it really was large enough to fit that description. Despite being made of dried clay, it rose almost five hundred meters above the ocean surface, so its great mass alone could function as a weapon. And unlike Ollerus, Mökkurkalfe was not using a spell to float on the surface. It was so overwhelmingly large that one could forget its feet were touching the ocean floor.

Mökkurkalfe had been patrolling around Sargasso at a uniform speed, but it was beginning to focus primarily on the region of the ocean in the direction of Academy City to the west.

A few shadows flying through the air slipped through the net of Hræsvelgr giant eagles and charged toward Sargasso.

They were Academy City bombers.

(Well, that isn't going to work. Even if I leave this to them, there is no guarantee they can do any real damage to Othinus. And if they do not stop the production of the lance, not even fleeing to the other side of the world will be enough to avoid the destruction. …In that case, I should continue this recklessness for a bit longer.)

The force trying to destroy Gremlin approached.

Ollerus calmly calculated that they were not powerful enough and made an immediate announcement.

"Knock them from the air."

Mökkurkalfe mercilessly swung its giant arm which produced a great roar as it tore through the air.

It was because he could do this that he had been able to infiltrate Gremlin.

It was because he could do this that he had grown somehow twisted.

Part 11

Kamijou had been blown toward the back of the train by an artificial blast of wind and the giant boar Hildisvíni had tried to charge at him. However, he had grabbed at the coat of his school uniform.

Even if he flailed his arms and legs around while in midair, he could not move as if swimming through water.

But what if he had something that could fan the air even more?

What if he unbuttoned his coat and spread it out?

"!"

Kamijou intentionally opened up only the right side. He had no guarantee it would work. It was a complete gamble. As soon as he did, his body moved as if being greatly twisted. The gust of wind was powerful enough to easily blast a human into the air, so it was obvious what would happen if he prepared a makeshift sail that increased the air resistance.

As his body spun, he was pushed to the side.

And he fell.

As the giant boar scraped along the top of the tunnel, it ran directly along the roof of the train. By that time, Kamijou had already avoided it by grabbing onto the edge of the roof with both hands and pressing against the wall. Hildisvíni was large enough to fill the empty space, but that was only the area above the roof of the train. The gap next to the train's wall was wide open. The wind produced by its giant form did not reach down there either.

"Gh… Pant, pant."

He had survived for the time being.

But if he climbed up now, Freyja would begin her attack once more. And she might not wait until after he had finished defenselessly climbing up.

He needed a way to fight back.

Fortunately, Freyja would likely assume she had won. With that much destruction, checking for a body would be difficult. He had to make his preparations during that slight period of safety. Currently, Kamijou was supported only by his ten fingers and was about to fall to the ground which was rushing by with tremendous speed below.

The biggest obstacle was removing his coat.

Removing his arms from the sleeves meant he had to temporarily support himself with only one arm.

With his removed coat in hand, Kamijou supported himself as if performing a pull up and slowly moved toward Freyja while clinging to the side of the train.

Once he was close enough, he only had to wait.

He waited for her to peer down at him.

All he did was throw his coat up to block her vision.

“Dammit! That’s your decision!?” shouted Freyja.

It seemed even a magician felt a bit fearful when her vision was blocked at the edge of a train. If she carelessly stepped off, she would fall straight for the ground.

Kamijou had to climb up onto the roof in that time, but it was still not enough. With her vision still blocked, Freyja purposefully dropped the jewel in her hand.

And she gave the incantation.

“Cost 1. White. Call / / Muninn.”

(I don’t have time to hesitate!!)

Kamijou faltered because his opponent was pregnant. He was quite hesitant. However, hesitating here would mean his death and Freyja would continue to use the baby inside her for her own purposes. If her shocking statement about two years having passed was true, he could not leave this be. Japan’s laws seemed to not give a fetus human rights as long as it was inside the womb, but he felt those laws could eat shit.

He would bet on the possibility of saving that child no matter how slim it was.

(Sorry!!)

While apologizing to the baby rather than Freyja and supporting himself with one hand, Kamijou swept his other hand along the roof. While Freyja struggled nervously with her vision cut off, he swept her feet out from under her from behind. Kamijou was considerate

enough to have her collapse onto her back rather than her stomach. He had no way of knowing how dangerous an act it was either way, though.

“Kh!!”

Before checking to make sure Freyja had fallen to her butt, Kamijou climbed up onto the train’s roof.

While lying face down, Kamijou saw the jewel on the floor gathering wet red thread.

He frantically stood up.

Just as it took the form of a giant bird and attacked, he smashed it to pieces with his right fist.

(Her attacks come from those strange jewels she calls Brísingamen.)

After making sure the bird had been destroyed, Kamijou quickly turned toward Freyja.

(If I can steal or destroy that, she won’t be able to attack. I will settle this no matter what! If I don’t take advantage of this timing, this will turn into a long, drawn-out fistfight. I want to avoid that for the baby’s sake!!)

A maternity dress was meant to reduce the burden on the mother. Its material was not made any thicker than necessary and it did not have a large number of unneeded pockets. He could clearly see her body lines through the dress and the only pockets were the ones on the left and right.

“There!!”

If the Brísingamen jewels were supported by magical power, he would not even need to steal them. Simply sticking his hand in her pocket would destroy all of the jewels she had stocked up like bullets.

This was checkmate.

But as soon as he thought that…

“Don’t…”

He heard a horribly low-pitched voice.

Freyja bent her right knee just once and pulled it back like compressing a spring. Her heel shot forcefully toward Kamijou’s gut.

“*Don’t touch my mother!!*”

Kamijou felt an impact in his solar plexus and heard an odd shout.

The breath was knocked out of him and he rolled backwards. Meanwhile, Freyja stood up and threw away the coat covering her upper body. As the coat was tossed by the powerful wind, Kamijou coughed and caught it in one hand.

And then he saw it.

He saw the fertility goddess Freyja.

On the large stomach of the woman who had given that name, a complex pattern was written in light as if rising up from within the maternity dress.

“It can’t be…”

He had been mistaken about something.

He had made a misunderstanding during his initial assumptions.

Kamijou could feel a strange chill running down his spine.

He had thought he was faced with the magician known as Freyja and the fetus being used as a calculation device.

But he had been wrong.

He recalled what she had said.

The mother had no magical sense, so the fetus was using magic.

In that case…

“Is it you?” muttered Kamijou in shock.

His voice said he still could not believe the thought that had entered his head.

He was looking toward the woman in a maternity dress, but he was not looking at her.

He looked at her large stomach as he spoke.

“*Are you Freyja!?*”

Part 12

It was often said that fetuses could hear the noises and voices of the surrounding world before leaving their mother's stomach.

That was why she had understood.

Even if she did not have the ability to accurately analyze and understand language, she had been able to distinguish the nuances and emotions of the words sent her way, at least to a certain extent.

Even if she had not wanted to, she had understood

Her mother had lived while everything in the world tried to crush her.

She had understood that this was due to her being inside the mother.

She did not know how she came to be inside the stomach of a mother so young, but she was certain she was not a child that the world wanted to be born. From the moment she was born…no, even before that, she had been hated by a large number of people.

And amid all that, her mother had desperately fought against that unreasonable world.

Even as that world tried to crush her mother from every single direction, that mother had desperately tried to protect the new life growing inside her.

In that crucible of malice, a deluge of verbal abuse had constantly washed over her mother. She had no way of knowing how painful that had been for her.

But…

If her mother had abandoned her, wouldn't it have all been over?

She had thought that but had been unable to do anything.

Even as a baby inside the womb, she had at times been able to move her arms and legs with her own will. However, her readiness to give up her own life to save her mother had come to nothing. Each time she swung her arms and legs, her mother had misinterpreted the act and only smiled and kindly rubbed her belly.

In the end, it seemed her mother was simply too kind a person.

She had lost all of her personal relationships, her parents and siblings had stopped supporting her, and she had been driven from where she lived. Even as she watched everything she had built up come crumbling down around her, the mother did not hate

her child. It was not that she worked to drive the thoughts from her mind; she never even considered it.

Despite having no assurances of a place to sleep or food to eat, her mother had knitted, told old stories that focused only on the good, and enthusiastically repeated a baseless magical charm meant to ensure her child was born safely.

That was the kind of person her mother had been.

And it may have been because her mother was like that that she had been able to think there was at least one good thing in that world otherwise blotted out by the color black.

The mother had done everything she could to protect her child.

The child had done everything she could to save her mother.

However…

Part 13

"There is…"

While swaying, Fertility Goddess Freyja slowly stood up on the train's roof.

No, that was not technically accurate.

She was controlling the mother through the umbilical cord connecting the mother and child.

"…someone I must save no matter what."

The tunnel ceiling grew a bit lower.

Kamijou bent his back without thinking, but Freyja continued standing tall. Seeing the ceiling rushing past just above the top of her head squeezed at Kamijou's heart.

"There is someone in such a hopeless situation that they will receive no comfort whatsoever even after ten years of work and one hundred years of research. I know that to be the case."

Kamijou did not know the exact situation, but he could take a guess as to who she was talking about.

If the child really was controlling the mother and the mother could not even stand on her own feet without being controlled, what had happened to the mother?

“What does this have to do with Gremlin and all the destruction they spread everywhere?”

Something had to have happened to that mother and child.

Something so terribly painful it would almost break his heart to hear it.

“They want to destroy the world. Are you saying you’re going along with that!?”

“You still haven’t truly seen what Gremlin is.”

A self-deprecating smile appeared on the woman’s face.

That smile appeared based on the will of the child that was borrowing her body.

“Even if ten years of work and a hundred years of research would all be meaningless, that magic god can ignore those restrictions. It does not matter how much malice fills her. As long as the lance is completed, that person can be saved from this nightmarish situation in which she will hit an inevitable dead end!!”

“…”

For an instant – just an instant – Kamijou thought about that possibility.

What if Magic God Othinus was not a bringer of destruction but instead reached out to help people?

But…

That was not the case.

“Someone who could calmly call the incidents in Hawaii and Baggage City a success could never have such a decent heart. And once that lance is complete, Othinus won’t have to listen to what anyone says!!”

“That’s fine. Either way, this stopgap method will not last forever. I may be controlling my mother through the umbilical cord right now, but that is putting her in a detached state where her sense of self grows gradually thinner. She will eventually reach a limit and completely vanish. But if I am removed, my mother will not even be able to keep her organs running. It is over either way. There is only one way to protect my mother from the destruction that is coming before long. I can only take in the contradiction and borrow the power of that magic god!!”

“Do you still not see the truth!? Othinus is only using that as a convenient tool to guide you. It’s the exact same thing happening in this city! The people think something is wrong,

but by making them think going along with it is to their advantage, everyone splits apart and no organized resistance rises up! That's all Othinus is thinking with you!!"

"My mother collapsed while protecting me!! If she had abandoned me, she could have returned safely to her former life, but she stuck with me!!"

Those words sounded like she was coughing up blood and they seemed to be accompanied by a physical blow.

A mere high school boy like Kamijou Touma did not have the foundation needed to deny those words.

However...

He was sure that woman in the maternity dress had fought amid all that.

She had fought to protect a life in some place Kamijou could not even imagine.

"So stay out of the way."

Kamijou heard a sound like something solid being scratched at.

By the time he realized something was wrong, it was too late.

"Until that time when I can return her body, I will not let anyone hurt my mother!!"

It came from below.

But there was nothing on the roof of the train below their feet.

It came from further below than that.

They were standing on a five-car train. There was a large space inside that giant box. When he had outwitted Freyja by climbing along the wall, he had been so focused on supporting his body that he had looked only at the hands supporting his weight. He had never looked inside the train car. But what if Freyja had made effective use of that space?

What if she had called in a large number of monsters while fighting Kamijou and had fed them all to a single monster to fatten it up?

"Cost 70. Black. Shift / / Níðhöggr Vol. 02!!"

Just as the five-car train left the tunnel and appeared aboveground, Kamijou's entire vision was filled with bright sunlight.

An attack came in that instant he was blinded.

Freyja cried out and something inside the car Kamijou stood on ripped it apart like plastic. A much too large red dragon appeared with its maw pointed upwards. Freyja took three or four steps backwards and moved to the next car forward. By the time Kamijou saw that, the entire destroyed car had already been tossed into the air. The following cars were dragged along and derailed.

He could not land on the roof of the remaining cars.

He would be smashed to pieces along with the back cars being turned to scrap.

(Shit.)

The woman in the maternity dress stood out of reach in front of him.

That was the much too young magician named Freyja and the mother who had tried to protect her.

That mother and child had been forced to rely on the slight possibility of Magic God Othinus's powers even if they knew Othinus was using them.

(I can't let it end like this… I still haven't grasped anything in my hand!!)

Suddenly, the falling motion of Kamijou's body clearly changed. This was due to external interference. When he realized that, Kamijou finally noticed someone was grabbing onto the back of his school uniform.

It was a girl who had fallen from the sky.

It was a girl who had carried out the acrobatics needed to jump onto the roof of the subway train.

It was a girl who could jump from high-rise building to high-rise building with her free control over magnetism.

It was a girl who already held a white girl in one hand and had saved Kamijou from a hopeless situation with her other hand.

It was Misaka Mikoto.

Academy City's #3 Level 5 and the Ace of Tokiwadai Middle School landed on the roof of the train like an arrow stabbing into it.

Only two cars remained.

Even after they landed and Kamijou sank to the roof, he still lacked confidence that he was alive.

“What a pain,” said Mikoto simply as she released Index from her right hand and Kamijou from her left. “I finally caught up to you, you idiot. Just because our cell phones don’t work is no reason to run off on your own and get cornered! Did you forget that you only have one life no matter what kind of power you have!?”

The white nun holding a calico cat sighed.

“Saying that won’t change Touma. And because nothing will change him, *we have no choice but to compromise*. Sorry, Touma, but I’m joining in this time. No matter what you say, I’m not backing down.”

There may have been people who would say this was pathetic.

There may have been people who would mock him as powerless.

There may have been people who would criticize him for getting others involved for his own selfish purposes.

But…

“…”

A cell phone fell onto the train roof.

It had fallen from Kamijou’s pocket while he was thrown from the train and roughly rescued by Mikoto.

Some button must have been pressed during the fall because the small electronic device began playing a message.

He had set it to record the message to his phone if there was a new message on the disaster message board service.

It was a short message only a few dozen seconds long.

He heard a familiar voice.

“Hey. I wonder if you can hear me. Touya-san, Touma-san. Is this reaching you?”

It was a female voice without a hint of unease or worry as if nothing at all was happening.

A mother.

That was a person that, unless special means were used such as Academy City’s cloning technology, anyone born into the world had one of. That was an adult that it was perfectly normal but occasionally irritating to have around.

“It looks like there is some kind of commotion outside, but I’m perfectly fine. Don’t worry about me and wait until all this dies down, okay?”

There was a mother and child who had not been allowed to give or be given that completely normal thing.

Not even once.

The child had not been born into the bright world and they had never seen each other’s faces.

That overwhelming unfairness lay before Kamijou’s eyes.

In that case, he could not worry about appearances. It did not matter if it was shameful, pathetic, or embarrassing. If it would allow him to destroy this nonsensical precipice, he would use anything. He would use anything and get anyone involved.

That was…

That was definitely…

“That is Freyja, a Gremlin magician. Her true form is the baby in the woman’s womb. It seems she used some method to save the collapsed mother which gave her temporary control over the mother’s body.”

Kamijou picked up his scratched cell phone, squeezed it, and spoke.

And he thought.

(But that is definitely not wrong.)

“Please. Lend me your power so I can save them both.”

In that instant, Index, the Anglican nun wearing a white habit and carrying a calico cat, fell silent for a moment. She slowly narrowed her eyes and thought on the meaning of the words coming from Kamijou Touma’s mouth.

In that instant, Misaka Mikoto, the girl with the nickname Railgun and wearing the blazer of Tokiwadai Middle School’s winter uniform, stopped moving as if thinking over the words she had heard.

They did not think it was too much to ask.

They did not find it to be a bother.

They had been waiting for those words for so long.

How long and painful had that wait been? The boy who had naturally spoken those words did not know how those girls felt. It would have taken hours or even days for them to say everything they wanted to say, but that did not matter for the moment.

The answer they had to give here was not something so long and unending.

They could take their time with that once this was all over.

They knew what would currently feel best as an answer for that boy who felt cornered and was seeking help.

“Leave it to me.”

“Leave it to me.”

The two girls took a large step forward to protect Kamijou Touma.

At the same moment, the train shot back into a tunnel.

Ahead of them was the Gremlin magician named Freyja. Behind them were the sounds of destruction as Níðhöggr Vol. 02 charged into the tunnel. It was clearly too large for the half circle space of the tunnel. If it continued forward, it could easily blow away the two remaining cars of the train. A powerful enemy lay ahead and behind, but Index and Misaka Mikoto both gave thin smiles.

They had nothing to be afraid of.

Their enemy was most likely unaware that they now stood in the place they had long dreamt of being in.

Part 14

It sounded both like the cry of silk being torn and the unique singing of an undiscovered culture.

As the white girl stood in the center, eight giant flower petals bloomed while fused to her ankles. It looked like the calculated beauty produced in nature to draw in insects for reproductive purposes. It looked like the artisanal beauty woven into the artificial subtleties of an analog clock face.

A great number of electrodes were sticking into the petals and various signals were being sent into the girl via cables. For better or for worse, those signals were producing extended high-pitched screams that stabbed at one’s heart.

“Good, good, good,” said Marian Slingeneyer from the poolside on the ruined deck of the luxury passenger ship.

A lance handle the length of a human arm sat at the bottom of the pool filled with a thick, transparent liquid.

It was gradually growing like watching a burning candle in reverse.

The growth was gradual but constant.

“The temporary switchover from magic to science went well. If this keeps up, we will surely make it through without issue.”

“You should stop using the word ‘surely’. It is meaningless.”

The production of the lance could not be completed with a magical ceremony alone, but the solution involved more than simply switching over from magic to science.

The ceremony was still based in magic.

To avoid that insurmountable barrier, they would temporarily switch over to the rails of the science side, but they could not complete the lance if they remained in the realm of science to the end. After overcoming that great barrier, they had to switch the rails back to magic.

Marian must have been nervous because she licked her lips even though they were not dry.

“Now then. This is the last tricky part. If we can manually overcome this, the rest will finish on its own.”

“No, wait,” said the eyepatch-wearing girl in a low voice.

The girl-shaped flower tilted to the side as it continued to emit that strange voice that sounded both like screaming and singing. Its lustrous and moisturized skin began to loosen like baggy clothing. Something was collapsing within. It resembled a decomposing corpse.

Marian Slingeneyer’s expression changed.

“Oh, crap… It’s going to take another ten minutes to switch back over. If the holistic esper collapses before then, the ceremony will hit a dead end here!!”

“…”

“Where are the dregs of the #2? He made this specimen, so he can replace the crumbling tissue!!”

Othinus did not reply to Marian's cries.

She instead took a step toward the white flower.

She crushed one of the eight petals underfoot and stared at the face of the girl-shaped specimen.

With one hand, she thrust her fingers toward that specimen's chest as if attempting to crush it.

The screaming and singing did not stop.

Othinus forced her hand inside and grabbed the area corresponding to a human's lungs. She squeezed like a pump to force air out.

"Othinus!?"

"Do you really think that empty husk will help us if he knows our plan will fail without him? In the time we spent negotiating, the production of the spear would fail." Othinus used her one eye to stare at Marian. "Do it. We only need this thing to last the ten minutes until you switch back over."

"…"

The white flower crumbled. Brown and black stains and wrinkles spread across it, so it could no longer be called "white".

Even so, the voice continued.

Dark red blood trickled from Othinus's eyepatch.

She had immense power, but things did not always progress as she wanted because her infinite possibilities held an equal number of successes and failures.

Sticky sounds could be heard.

It was impossible to distinguish the sounds of the magic god crumbling from those of the flower crumbling.

Finally, the cruelly decomposed flower bent at the neck and the entire head fell to the poolside floor. It completely burst with a splatting sound. It looked like the remains of a fruit that no one had picked and not even any animals had shown interest in.

The singing stopped.

Marian Slingeneyer collapsed to a sitting position on the ground.

“We did it.”

“Not all of it.”

“Okay, fine. We managed to switch back. We can just sit back and watch the lance complete itself. There is no way it can fail now!!”

“I see.”

The eyepatch-wearing girl removed her foot from the discolored remains of the flower petal that had completely crumbled. It was reminiscent of a flower that was returning to the earth after dropping its seeds and completing its role.

The core of Othinus shook.

“Othinus?”

“You said we can just take a nap now, right? I will focus on mending myself. If I did it here, the great power could blow away the ceremony.”

“Then why don’t you rely on one of the other members? You still might not succeed, after all. Let’s see, I think Iðunn and Sif are free, so-…”

The eyepatch-wearing girl held out a hand to stop Marian from continuing.

She then walked away from the pool.

As Marian Slingeneyer watched the girl leave, the other girl who had taken the form of a black drum clattered next to her.

Marian looked toward the pool.

The lance had already reached two meters in length and a sharp blade was forming on the end.

“Just a bit more,” she muttered.

The lance was intended to reach 250 cm.

“Just a bit more and you won’t have to go to all that effort, Othinus.”

With those last 50 cm, the world would change.

Part 15

It did not matter how many new enemies arrived.

Fertility Goddess Freyja held a key that ensured her victory.

While ignoring the tunnel ceiling growing lower again, she stared at her enemies and shouted.

“Cost 1. White. Call / / Hildisvíni!”

She threw a jewel, a great amount of wet red thread wrapped around it, and a boar was born.

That was all she had to do.

Hildisvíni was the beast the goddess Freyja rode in Norse mythology. She would have it play that role here. Even Freyja would be killed instantly if she jumped from the fast-moving train, but she could survive with a cushion between herself and the ground. She would use the boar for that.

Now she merely had to send Níðhöggr Vol. 02 charging in from behind. The attack would fill the entire tunnel and smash the train to pieces.

That would annihilate her enemies.

Both Freyja and her enemies would be thrown into the air, but Freyja alone would have a cushion to allow herself to escape unscathed.

No matter how dirty the method, she would make sure to protect her mother.

She would not let anyone lay another finger on her.

“Destroy everything, Níðhöggr Vol. 02!!”

She gave the final command.

That giant dragon gained an extra burst of speed as if crossing the final line.

That dragon had cost seventy jewels. Even if it ran headlong into a ten-car linear motor train, it would smash the train without taking any damage itself.

However…

Something happened just before the dragon struck.

“Shut up!!!!!”

Mikoto jumped back as if performing a backflip.

Powerful magnetism pulled her forcefully toward the back of the train. It looked like she was throwing a dropkick with the force of a shell. That short and slender girl would be smashed to a pulp the instant she touched any spot on the tunnel, but she did not hesitate to jump from the safe zone and toward Níðhöggr Vol. 02.

The greatest roar yet burst out.

And that roar was followed by many more.

As Mikoto launched herself horizontally toward the dragon, she could be seen pulling several arcade coins from her skirt.

She fired repeatedly at point blank range.

This was the attack that gave her the nickname of Railgun and she fired it again and again to her heart’s content.

The entire tunnel shook ominously and small fragments fell from the ceiling.

“It…can’t be…”

The giant dragon’s advance was stopped in an instant.

Freyja and the others’ on the moving train saw what could only be called its remnants disappearing. Their minds had numbed to the point that they could understand nothing more than that.

Now that Níðhöggr Vol. 02 could not destroy the train, Freyja had to rethink her entire plan.

But Kamijou Touma and Index were not going to give her that time.

Just as the tunnel ceiling rose up, the two of them took a large step forward.

They boldly moved straight toward her.

“Tch!!”

Fertility Goddess Freyja scattered many, many jewels across the roof. Brísingamen was especially popular and well-known even within Norse mythology, so it had been studied by plenty of researchers. Nevertheless, it remained a black box with unknown effects and unknown symbolism. When she threw the core which held that name, she would construct a unique spell using the mother’s body and the womb.

“Cost 1. Black. Call / / Þrymr.”

“Cost 1. White. Call / / Hrímfaxi.”

“Cost 1. Black. Call / / Hymir.”

“Cost 1. White. Call / / Huginn.”

“Cost 1. Black. Call / / Svaðilfari.”

Who would produce what and what would eat what? She spread her options as wide as she could. She could force her way through with numbers or she could crush them with one giant monster. She expanded a spider web-like flowchart that allowed her to adapt to any number of situations.

However…

“S F O C I C R Y S!! (Fill in the missing gear of the song for the blessed child!!)”

Freyja’s entire body stiffened as the white nun gave her incantation.

This was Spell Intercept.

Index used a shorthand code called Notarikon to interfere with an opposing magician’s incantation and take control of the spell. Index could not refine magic power on her own, but she had put together this single compilation of skills to take part in battles using the supernatural power known as magic.

That girl took all the knowledge contained in the 103,000 grimoires stored in her head to instantly analyze her opponent’s attack method, search out the most effective method of interfering, and use that against her enemy.

At the same time, Kamijou Touma spoke to Index who was facing the enemy magician.

He told her to analyze the magic being used to give birth to those “children”.

“Now that I think about it, it didn’t really make sense,” said Kamijou after letting out a slow breath. “You said you worked to protect your mother from within her womb. But how and where did you learn magic? Was your mother a magician? Perhaps, but seeing as your magic is specialized toward giving birth to ‘children’, I can guess what it is all based on. Do you know what that is?”

“…”

“Magic used to safely give birth to your child,” said Kamijou as if thrusting the words at her. “*The original magic was made to ensure you were safely born!* I don’t know if that was a spell involving an actual procedure or if it was nothing but a magic charm, but it

wasn't something meant to hurt people!! You remade it into attack magic so you could join Gremlin. If that's true...!!"

"So what if it is?" asked Freyja with a voice so low it sounded like she was chanting a curse. "No matter what it originally was, it failed in the end!! If I leave my mother and she loses my support, she will be unable to even breathe. She will die. But if I stay in here, her sense of self will gradually fade away. Either way, I can't protect her with any normal means!! I can't escape this dead end without a magic god's power to make the impossible possible!!"

"*Then let Index finish it. Let her use her collection of knowledge that can reach the level of a magic god if used all together!!*" replied Kamijou Touma without a moment's hesitation. "Those 103,000 grimoires can bring this to an end without the power of a magic god!! You could say you and your mother have reversed the normal relationship between a mother and fetus. Until a certain point, the fetus lives off of the blood, nutrients, and oxygen of the mother, but a switch is thrown so the child can supply all of those on her own once she is born. This is the same. If we can reveal the spell meant to allow the child a safe birth and send it into the mother that is fully reliant on you, your mother should be able to keep her heart beating on her own just as when a child leaves its mother!!"

The magician named Freyja was using her mother's senses to make her way through the world, but she was actually a tiny life curled up in that mother's stomach. In that instant, she was unable to grasp the identity of what it was descending upon her.

The world was overwhelmingly dark and filled with malice pressing against her from all sides. She had been hated by a great number of people even before being born and her mother had desperately tried to protect her amid all that.

Just how great a disadvantage would her birth be?

Even as her mother's body was about to break while desperately working to support her, someone had attacked that mother.

Unable to fight back, she had been knocked to the dark road surface. At the very, very end, she had used her hands to protect not her own head but her large stomach. That was likely why the mother's life had been damaged beyond the point of no return.

And so Freyja had given up.

She had given up on hoping for anything from that dark world. The one soft and bright thing in her life had been cruelly taken for someone else's benefit. In a world in which even that would be taken, there could not be any light remaining whatsoever.

And so she had not hesitated to twist the laws of that world.

As her mother lay on the road with something crucial broken within her body, Freyja had not hesitated to take control of that body. She had instinctually known that her mother would stop breathing otherwise. And she had already decided she would do anything to

protect her mother. What she had needed to do first was exterminate the masked attacker who stood before her mother's eyes.

And so she had distanced herself from the warm future her mother had wished for her.

That mother had been a truly harmless woman who knew nothing of magic. At some point, she had learned a magic charm to give birth to a healthy baby and she had desperately repeated it over and over. Freyja had thoroughly analyzed that charm down to its numerical values and the logic behind it. She had rewritten it and built up the magic she needed to endure fighting in that dark world filled with nothing but bogs and shed blood. She crushed her mother's ideals in order to save that mother.

She had needed no reason.

She had never thought up a single excuse.

She had not seen herself as having fallen so low as to worry about that kind of thing when it came to rescuing her mother's life.

However…

"I…"

For one thing, Freyja's current state was not normal by any stretch of the imagination.

Normally thinking, a fetus could never control the mother. Even if the pregnancy had lasted two years and even if she had taken control of a portion of the mother's brain, she should not have been able to fully use logic and language at such in immature state.

She had used magic to twist all of that.

Index was attempting to accurately analyze it all.

It went beyond how she used the Brísingamen jewels as an attack. Index was essentially attempting to hack into the single system known as Fertility Goddess Freyja that was made up of the mother and the fetus.

"I decided I would protect my mother no matter what I had to do. Even if I had to sell my soul to a magic god and even if I had to spill great amounts of innocent blood as a pawn of Gremlin, I decided I would do this! I decided I would do it myself!!"

"It's over," cut in Kamijou. He repeated himself. "It's over now. You no longer have to use that bare hostility as a weapon to protect your mother. That horrible unfairness is over, Freyja. You can trust people now."

A great cry exploded out.

It was accompanied by a heavy roar.

A large man and a giant horse had taken a step forward. They were both made from a complex collection of wet red thread.

There was no meaning in this fight.

Now that Fertility Goddess Freyja no longer had to obey Magic God Othinus, she had no more reason to fight for Gremlin.

The reason Freyja did not back down was because she did not know how to trust people.

But Kamijou did not think that was wrong or meaningless.

After all, it was completely natural.

That was something she could learn bit by bit after being born and facing this wide world.

What was wrong was the great burden that much too small body had borne for so long.

“Index.”

Kamijou once more stepped forward to face the approaching threat.

He spoke without turning around.

“I’ll take out everything that tries to interfere. I’ll buy you the time you need to prepare. You can focus on this one thing without worrying.”

He stared forward.

He confronted those monsters of muscle that held frightening strength.

He confronted them and he spoke.

“So do this.”

Kamijou and the monsters ran full speed toward each other.

Their clash lasted an instant.

While it was an important element that would decide the trend of the situation, it was a trivial matter that did not produce a single scratch.

The white nun muttered an accurate incantation under her breath.

The young child trying to protect her mother let out a bestial cry.

Kamijou naturally smiled as he used his right fist to blow away the monsters of muscle that were made up of dark red thread wrapped around a jewel.

“It’s over, Freyja,” he said without thinking.

All of this had just been a long rehearsal. Her true performance was yet to come.

“So let’s end this and bring on the next age. We’re waiting for you in the wide world ahead of you!!”

♦

The battered train left the dark, dark tunnel.

And it entered the bright, white sunlight.

“…Uh?”

The train no longer held any monsters with the strength to crush a human in a single blow or any Gremlin magicians who possessed the frightening power and skills needed to keep the head of a nation from acting.

“Um, excuse me. Where am I?”

This was the same pregnant woman as before, but she asked that question with a frailty that was completely different from before.

This was no longer a mother whose fetus had been forced to take control to keep her alive.

This mother and child were no different from those found anywhere.

Part 16

The train carrying Kamijou, Index, and Freyja continued on. Freyja had lost consciousness as if sleeping and Kamijou and Index did their best to stay down. They did not want to be thrown from the roughly shaking train and the ceiling came frighteningly low at some points, so they did not want to stand up if they could avoid it.

The subway train continued all the way to Tokyo Station before stopping.

“Damn. So it won’t take us all the way to Tokyo Bay. Moving to a different train is a pain right now.”

Shinbashi or Shiodome would have been closer to Tokyo Bay. It was not that far from here, but that distance would feel a lot longer while walking through those crowds. They had to think up some other means of travelling.

(...?)

For some reason, the large station was completely deserted. The main entrances may have been sealed off early on and the remaining people may have been led out through the staff entrances and evacuation corridors. They had actually wanted people out so they could use the station themselves, but the official reason had likely been to protect the people from being killed by the smoke if a fire broke out.

This subway facility had handled the situation very differently from the one on Shinjuku.

That alone showed just how confused the station workers were.

(What? The platform is covered in tons of wooden boxes.)

They could not stay on the train's roof forever. If it set off again, they would not be able to climb down.

"Now then."

Kamijou had been worried because over half the train's cars had been damaged or derailed, but after climbing down and checking inside, it seemed the train had held no normal passengers. A single man sat in the driver's seat and the passenger areas were filled with tons of wooden boxes.

Kamijou did not even need to check on the contents.

The man in the driver's seat did not look like a normal driver hired by the railroad company. The camouflage he wore was a dead giveaway.

(The riot police or the JSDF are using the railroad to transport materials. Those boxes aren't full of ammunition, are they?)

He was worried because a dragon had broken through the roof of one of the passenger cars and several of the cars had derailed, but it seemed no one had been hurt.

Freyja may have intentionally set it up that way.

That child had been fighting against the unfairness of the world to protect her mother, so she may have wanted to avoid sullying her mother's hands as much as possible.

Kamijou wondered how difficult it had been to get Gremlin to recognize her as a useful member of that inhuman organization.

“At any rate, the driver looks fine.”

Kamijou knocked on the door to the driver’s area and called out to the man but received no response. He and his organization had likely been trying to stop Gremlin’s invasion in their own way, but he had apparently fallen into mental shock upon seeing Gremlin’s destructive power up close.

Index spoke from the roof.

“Touma, what should we do?”

“I’m probably a high priority target for Gremlin. Not because of my strength or anything but because my right hand can stop the production of that lance. The best way of keeping her safe would be to keep her as far away from us as we can.”

On the other hand, they could not just leave Fertility Goddess Freyja while she was unconscious. She was a member of Gremlin and could possibly regain her great strength under the right conditions.

Gremlin would want to capture her to regain her power and the defenders would want to capture her to defend against Gremlin’s invasion.

“I see. So you give top priority to the girl. I see, I see,” said Index.

“I haven’t done anything wrong, so why are you glaring at me like I’m a terrible person?”

Either due to passing out or due to the child inside her stomach, the woman in the maternity dress showed no sign of waking up after closing her eyes that first time.

According to Index, her breathing and heart rate were normal. However, her sense of self was quite thin due to giving control of her body to someone else for two years. It would apparently take some time before she could naturally accept that role back and fully regain control of her own body. It would be similar to regaining feeling in a limb that had gone to sleep.

It took some doing to lower her from the train roof.

Fortunately, Index’s spell to return control from the fetus to the mother was not needed after the switch had been made. That meant Kamijou could touch the mother with his right hand with no ill effects.

Index worked from above and Kamijou worked from below to lower the calmly sleeping woman to the platform.

Index looked like she was about to jump down after her, but Kamijou frantically recommended she instead use the ladder on the side of the train.

“Touma, I hear a clanking sound.”

“It seems the other tracks are running, too. They may be using Tokyo Station as a relay point for transporting supplies.”

“That sign is covered in so many colorful lines that I can’t tell what it means!”

“The Japanese salarymen who can read this really are amazing.”

They walked down some stairs, headed for a different subway platform, climbed over the ticket barrier, and succeeded in boarding a different train. The subway train was being used as a cargo train, so the car was filled with wooden boxes. That gave them plenty of places to hide. And due to the structure of the train, all of the doors opened when boxes were being loaded or unloaded, so sneaking aboard was easy as well.

“If this place was safe, we could leave Freyja with the station workers.”

“You aren’t going to?”

“If this station is being used as a central supply base, Gremlin might target it. And if the people working here learn Freyja is a member of Gremlin, things could get bad.”

As the train shook, it took them to the harbor area that bordered Tokyo Bay.

Just as Kamijou thought they would arrive at the station, the train passed right by and continued through the tunnel. It came out above ground and arrived at a switchyard near the bay.

“Is this Shinbashi? No, Shiodome?”

Kamijou lived within the walls of Academy City, so he had little knowledge of the 23 special wards in the city. However, even he had to tilt his head here. Was there a switchyard in a place like this?

It may have been a facility belonging to the Fire and Disaster Management Agency or Ministry of Defense that had not been officially announced. But if that was the case, an amateur like him would find nothing if he searched the internet for the answer.

Once again, all of the doors opened.

“Let’s get off here. …Help me out, Index. I’ll climb to the ground first and you take care of Freyja.”

Meanwhile, a rubber boat with an engine attached passed by along a nearby river. It was headed toward the mouth of the river.

Kamijou recognized the girls on board.

They also noticed him, so the rubber military landing boat decelerated, made a U-turn, and came right up to the edge of the switchyard.

“You’ve caught yourself another strange girl? And this one’s pregnant?”

It was Birdway.

She was operating the tiller and engine while Lessar and Kumokawa Maria sat in the boat.

Index looked like she was about to be crushed under the weight of the woman and it would be a big deal if she was dropped, so Kamijou could not leave Freyja (technically, it was her mother) with Index. However, if Kamijou held that sleeping woman in his arms, it seemed things would develop in an amusing but chaotic direction.

“You three would be amazed if you knew what’s happened while you’ve been leisurely floating around.”

But something else happened before he could get to an actual explanation.

With the sound of scattering sparks, Misaka Mikoto fell from the sky and used magnetism to land on the metal railing alongside the river mouth.

“Honestly!! You make that big announcement about fighting together and then leave me behind after the very first attack!? …And why are you forcing yourself on the pregnant woman who was trying to kill you not long ago?”

“Please let me answer one question at a time!! You’re chaining them together like some kind of competitive puzzle game!!”

A great number of sparks appeared along the path of the rubber boat and Misaka Mikoto’s descent. Between fifty and one hundred flame figures appeared, so they did not have time to stand around talking.

Birdway held up her wand and Misaka Mikoto flicked a coin up with her thumb.

With a great roar, the army of automatic soldiers was blown to pieces before it could begin to attack.

Lessar calmly placed a hand over her eyes and looked off into the distance.

“Hmm. It really does look like these attack automatically if you exceed a certain speed. Does it check over a distance of ten meters?”

“I ran into some at the subway station. Is that what calls them in?”

“By the way, I’m perfectly fine with a guy who can’t help but go for a pregnant woman.”

“I’m not fine with that!!” protested Kamijou.

Kumokawa Maria wore a maid uniform colored in black and yellow like a bee and she slowly looked away from Kamijou.

“That’s going a bit far for me. I know you should try to value as many things as you can, but that’s just…yeah…”

“It’s going a bit far for me, too!! What is with this? Can no one see anything but what they want to see? If you think you can escape your lack of knowledge by typing your favorite words into a search engine, you are sorely mistaken!!”

However, he did not have time to spend hours solving the misunderstandings. For one thing, Kamijou Touma’s life was made up of a series of those misunderstandings. The bitter flavor of his life was stronger than that of a pain reliever made from 50% kindness.

Birdway smacked the cover of the rubber boat’s engine.

“Well, at least we managed to meet up. Gremlin’s base of Sargasso is located on Tokyo Bay. We’ll be heading straight there. They may have destroyed the major roads and railroads to set up a thick barricade of living flesh with the crowds filling Tokyo, but that has no effect on the ocean. Now that we’ve come this far, it finally looks like we can actually do something.”

“Magic God Othinus.”

“I have serious doubts whether that monster can be killed with direct strength. However, she’s currently producing that lance. If we interfere in the large-scale ceremony that Gremlin is pouring all of their power into, the energy that has lost anywhere to go will bare its fangs toward the spell user. Even if we can’t kill her, there is a decent possibility her own power can be used to kill her.”

Most likely, none of them fully approved of the word “kill” being used there, but they all knew Gremlin had to be stopped. Setting aside the question of how far they would go, they needed to prevent Magic God Othinus from doing anything more.

“If you understand, then get aboard. We can’t waste any more time. …And don’t tell me you plan to bring that pregnant woman along with you.”

“To be honest, I can’t figure out what to do with her. Do you think the hospitals are running properly right now? And is there a safe route to get her there? From what I heard, the child has been in there for two years. I have no idea what will happen or when, so I can’t just leave her in some warm place and-…”

He trailed off because a powerful gust of wind blew through.

A shadow appeared overhead.

Kamijou looked up and his face stiffened.

It was Níðhöggr.

That giant monster which had glared down at the people from the top of the tower earlier was now soaring very close nearby.

That dark red dragon passed above Kamijou and the others and then slowly circled around in midair. After turning 180 degrees, it charged toward them again.

The first pass had been to locate its enemies in preparation.

The second pass was the attack.

As the dragon charged at them with tremendous speed, it showed no concern about striking the ground. It flapped its wings to pick up more speed as if it was fine with creating a giant crater in the ground and causing that coastal area to crumble and allow seawater in.

With his hands full due to holding the woman in a maternity dress, Kamijou shouted to Mikoto.

“I thought you defeated that thing!”

“I did!! This one is a lot bigger. It looks easily over a hundred meters long! If a mass that large slams into the ground with the speed needed to catch up to a supersonic passenger plane…!”

“This is different from those sparks from before. It has some special conditions for attacking.”

“Does it have to do with that pregnant woman?”

Birdway and Lessar prepared strange spiritual items.

Níðhöggr may not have been trying to exterminate them. Fertility Goddess Freyja had been the primary person sealing off Tokyo, so her defeat may have triggered a rescue attempt by the dragon. It may have been ordered to do that from the beginning.

But it was all for nothing.

Freyja no longer wanted to be rescued by Gremlin and this violent method would smash both enemy and ally to pieces. Freyja may have originally intended to provide adjustments for this simple rescue order, but she could not do so anymore.

The impact from that great mass would tear into the planet.

None of them could stop it.

Even if they tried to run, they could not escape that dragon. The destruction would be on too large a scale and it was not a simple mass of stone falling from the sky. It flapped its giant wings to adjust its course and accelerate. It would follow them if they tried to run, so they had no way to escape.

(Dammit.)

The enemy was approaching from the sky, so Kamijou and Kumokawa Maria's hand-to-hand combat was of no use.

They could only rely on Misaka Mikoto, Birdway, and Lessar.

But could those three push that dragon back?

Kamijou glanced around in search of something to use as a shield or wall, but he found nothing. The switchyard had a number of trains stopped in it and it had warehouses that were likely used for maintenance, but none of those were strong enough to withstand this attack.

They had to worry about both the initial impact and the immense shockwave it produced.

The trains would roll like empty snack boxes and the warehouses would be smashed flat. When the attack would eliminate all unevenness in the area and leave only empty land behind, thinking about cover was hopeless.

"What can I do!?"

"Stay out the way!!" roared Birdway.

A coin was fired at three times the speed of sound and multiple explosions followed behind it.

It did have an effect.

The dragon's silhouette crumbled as if its temporary flesh was being torn away.

However, the dragon ignored it.

Níðhöggr continued charging toward the ground at full speed.

(It didn't work!!)

Kamijou began to squeeze his eyes shut.

But then he saw something else.

He saw a man's silhouette.

The man grabbed a crane's wire and flew through the air like a pendulum. He appeared in the space between the dragon and the ground. Níðhöggr did not hesitate to tear this intrusion to pieces with its giant maw. The man made no attempt to dodge. His body was taken between the dragon's teeth and the destruction began.

It was as if the man had wanted that.

Immediately afterwards, a bluish-white blade of light extended from the dragon's mouth and sliced its giant body two or three times.

"Ah…" said Kumokawa Maria without thinking from aboard the rubber boat.

She recognized the silhouette.

She recognized that man who had constructed a spell to neutralize only the fatal wounds he received and a sword spell that amplified its tremendous sharpness the more he was injured.

"Ahhh!!"

The man had not sliced the dragon into pieces.

That would have left the pieces of that giant corpse to rain down on the switchyard. The countless flashes of that sword of light did not fully slice through the dragon's body. He left the pieces attached like vegetables cut by a terrible cook.

All he needed was air resistance.

He needed to throw off the dragon's balance.

Níðhöggr's giant body could no longer maintain its orientation, so the direction of its flight greatly changed as if a giant invisible hand were moving it off course. The dragon now headed toward the river instead of the land and it crashed into the water, starting with its battered head. Water flew in every direction with incredible force and the rubber boat shook, but that was all. A hopeless situation similar to an asteroid strike did not occur.

The man in the air twisted his body around a few times to adjust the direction of his fall and landed on the gravel-covered ground after falling from a height of over ten meters. The bluish-white blade of light extending from between his index finger and middle finger slowly disappeared.

He was Bersi.

He was Kihara Kagun.

This man was officially a member of Gremlin and had supposedly died during the commotion in Baggage City. He had risen again with the power of Magic God Othinus, but that had not meant his life had been saved or that he was once more working for Gremlin of his own will.

He was still dead even now.

He had completely lost the life force he should have produced. Instead, he was a doll that never rotted and moved using the magic power injected into him from outside.

The look in Birdway and Lessar's eyes showed those two girls of the magic side had silently put up their guards.

But Kumokawa Maria was a bit different.

Kihara Kagun was acting somehow different from the lifeless doll she had seen at the end of the incident in Baggage City.

And finally, she found it.

There was a slight scar on the back of his neck.

Part 17

The eyepatch-wearing girl in Sargasso narrowed her one eye slightly and looked up.

Part 18

That man had once devoted everything to take revenge on and kill a certain Kihara.

He had thought of every possibility and left behind backdoors with which to escape any dilemma.

One of his ideas was a countermeasure for a very dirty and Kihara-like method.

From the beginning, Kihara Kagun had considered a certain hopeless possibility.

What if he failed in his revenge and, upon his defeat to Kihara Byouri, control of his physical body was taken in some way? What if he was ordered to attack one of the people he most wanted to avoid baring his fangs against?

To escape such a situation…

“There’s something embedded in here,” muttered Kumokawa Maria. “That freed him from being controlled like a doll!!”

It was nothing more than a small semiconductor.

A list of how Kihara Kagun would act given certain conditions had been inserted as a string of 1s and 0s. Kihara Kagun was not thinking using the brain of Kihara Kagun.

However, a tiny effect would appear only when he was forced to do something that was “not like him”.

He wanted to ensure that he would take the actions that were “like him” based on the list he had inputted into the device.

1. He would exterminate his enemy, Kihara Byouri.

2. As long as it did not interfere with 1, he would limit the loss of life of both enemy and ally as much as possible.

3. To achieve 2, the damage or destruction of anything other than human life was allowable.

No one but Kihara Kagun himself knew those rules. He had already fought a few times along the coast of Tokyo Bay in order to fulfill those conditions.

It was not limited to this attack on Níðhöggr.

He had only run across Kumokawa Maria by coincidence and had recklessly tried to save the people there while he saved Freyja.

It was the same as that time when he had held a shovel and stood before a killer in order to protect a few children.

“…”

He would no longer say anything to her.

That device most likely did not support something so complicated.

No one could ever know the truth of the matter.

However…

“I’m going to stay here,” said Kumokawa Maria.

She stepped out of the rubber boat and onto the concrete bank of the river.

“Someone needs to take this pregnant woman to a safe place, right? I’ll take her. …And she might not be the only one in an urgent situation. Even if the rest of you go to defeat the cause of all this, it wouldn’t hurt to have someone in the city, right?”

Kumokawa Maria slowly took Freyja from Kamijou’s arms.

“You understand…right?” asked Kamijou.

“I have already accepted that he is dead,” she readily said. “This is just the last remaining trace. It’s like finding his will after the fact. Most likely, he wasn’t trying to save me. Nor was he only trying to save this woman. …In the end, he hasn’t changed. He tries to save everyone around him even if it wears away every last piece of his own body. Someone needs to reward his foolish selfishness.”

She was not trying to run from reality.

She did not think she could save this moving corpse.

In that case, it was her problem.

Kamijou Touma had no right to stop her.

“We’re counting on you, then.”

“We’re counting on you, too.”

With that short exchange, Kamijou Touma and Kumokawa Maria went on their separate ways.

The boy climbed aboard the rubber boat along with Index and Misaka Mikoto.

Birdway steered the small boat away from the shore.

They continued into the fog-like steam covering Tokyo Bay.

They moved toward Gremlin’s base of Sargasso.

Part 19

As Kihara Kagun moved his feet as precisely as the second hand of a clock, Kumokawa Maria followed behind with the pregnant woman in her arms.

She had not noticed before, but a large number of men in camouflage were collapsed in the area. They seemed to be riot police and JSDF members.

Most likely, they were volunteers who had attempted to fight Gremlin without knowing what a threat the group was.

The armored vehicles and self-propelled guns had been sliced to pieces, but the people were almost entirely unscathed. If a single shell had been fired at Gremlin, the counterattack would have caused such great destruction that the people would have been smashed into too many pieces to count. Kumokawa Maria could clearly imagine that simple truth after what she had seen in Baggage City.

Kihara Kagun had carried out an obvious act of destruction.

It may have been a quick decision after receiving an order from Gremlin.

However, he had ultimately protected the lives of his enemies.

"..."

Seeing that, Kumokawa Maria knew that man never would have changed.

She had once viewed him with nothing but respect and admiration, but her impression of him had changed after her short but deep contact with him.

He was definitely not suited to being part of a household.

She doubted he could fit within the structure of society even in his job.

No matter how old he grew, he spoke seriously of dreams and ideals, he refused to look at problems realistically, and he smiled at the small results he gained even as he lost so much more. That was likely who he truly had been. He had not been perfect. In fact, his personality had contained more negatives and problems than anything else. While young, Kumokawa Maria had just so happened to see the lovely side of him.

However, she did not feel disappointed.

In fact, even if it was all over, she felt fortunate to have seen the human side of him that was closer to his true self.

She no longer distorted her view of him or deified him.

She could now speak properly about this man who had been lost.

"I'll stay with you."

Kumokawa Maria walked alongside that man while holding that unconscious pregnant woman in her arms.

“I have no choice, so I’ll stay with you. Just like leaving flowers by a grave, this is nothing more than self-satisfaction, but what’s wrong with one person being led around by this awkward will? I will not stop you anymore. Just like in Baggage City, you will probably wear away every last piece of your body to achieve your goal, but I will watch over you as you do so.”

That man gave no response.

She knew he would not.

“So…”

This was a living human replying to a will.

It was no different from speaking to a grave.

“So…”

But…

Kumokawa Maria did not think it was meaningless. Just because those words would not reach anyone’s ears and just because science could not prove her actions would accomplish anything, this was not something one could make light of.

“Once you see this selfishness through until you cannot move a finger, you truly lose your human form, and you face true death as nothing but a pile of flesh, then we can return to our city.”

Below that chilly November sky, a certain girl was able to stand next to a certain man after several years had passed.

In that instant, she accepted the death of someone she cared about. That was an instant anyone had to overcome at some point.

EPILOGUE

Lance.

Lance_of_"Gungnir".

Birdway guided the rubber military boat through the steam covering Tokyo Bay.

In addition to her, the boat contained Kamijou Touma, Index, Misaka Mikoto, Lessar, and the calico cat.

A gray curtain that could cause one to lose their sense of direction filled the space around them evenly in all directions. The scenery looked like some kind of eerie illusion rather than a part of Tokyo.

"They have to have noticed us," said Birdway quickly.

Even now, those sparks floated down around the rubber boat because it was moving above a certain speed. However, Birdway did not wait around for them. She kept the boat running at full speed and passed by the sparks before they could materialize as fire figures. The fire figures therefore lost sight of their target the instant they were born, so they sank into the ocean without doing anything.

Thinking back, Kamijou realized it had been Níðhöggr that initially attacked the supersonic passenger plane. No flame figures had appeared inside the plane. They may have divided up which targets they went after.

The rubber boat continued toward Sargasso with an eerie trail of orange light behind it.

"Gremlin will have long since noticed our approach. The question is whether they're too focused on producing the lance to send anyone after us or…"

They then heard a low rumbling as if from an earthquake.

A giant mountain-like shadow suddenly appeared in the gray fog surrounding them. They had to have been a few kilometers away still, so the overwhelming scale squeezed at Kamijou's chest. This was even larger than the dragon from before.

That giant humanoid shadow rose over five hundred meters from the surface of the ocean. Kamijou's common sense was shaken by the thought of something that large standing on two legs.

"What…is that?" he muttered. "Is that part of Gremlin, too? How much nonsensical power are they hiding!?"

"This is the group that sent a mobile fortress several dozen kilometers long flying through the air. Don't act so surprised to see an enemy measured in kilometers."

If they had truly wanted to destroy Tokyo, they could have done so at any time.

The only reason the city still retained its form was because the strategy they chose had happened to be one of distributing what people stood to gain.

"Don't let it get to you," snapped Birdway. "We can't get past without defeating this thing. If we focus our attacks on a single leg and keep it from moving, we can get past. Don't forget that this is just the opening act. We're here to stop the production of the lance."

Before Kamijou could respond, the giant shadow split into a few chunks and sank into the ocean.

"What!?"

"Before you start asking questions, shut your mouth and hang on!! You don't want to bite your tongue or get thrown out, do you!?"

After a lag of a few dozen seconds, a great wave mercilessly struck the rubber boat. Birdway tried to keep the front of the boat as perpendicular to the wave as possible to ride over it. A few undulations measuring several meters passed by. The rubber boat was light and it could not right itself very well. It could have easily capsized.

"That's the cornerstone of Sargasso's defenses, right!? I doubt it would crumble on its own. Did someone take it out!?"

"Don't ask me!"

"Isn't there only one option if it wasn't us?"

Lessar's comment caused Birdway to frown as she desperately worked to control the combined tiller and engine.

"You mean it was done from within Sargasso?"

♦

Amid the many remains of ships making up Sargasso sat a single plate.

The plate was made from dried clay and a dark red heart sat atop it while continuing to beat.

It belonged to Mökkurkalfe.

Mökkurkalfe was an enemy of Thor in Norse mythology. It was an artificial life form that was made from a mare's heart contained within a giant mountain-like body of clay. The legend said the mare was so cowardly that Mökkurkalfe could not fight properly and Thor's servant destroyed it.

So if the defective heart was replaced with a more powerful item, one could create an overwhelming power worthy of being an enemy of the gods.

A slender arm held that heart.

It belonged to Lightning God Thor.

As if acting out the legend, that boy picked the heart up from the plate while ignoring the iron-smelling liquid staining his fingertips and palm.

No. Technically, that was not what was happening.

He may have looked exactly the same, but this boy was someone other than Lightning God Thor.

"…"

He did not hesitate and no change came over his voice or expression.

The boy crushed the dark red heart. With the sound of a rotting fruit being thrown against a wall, the remains of the heart fell to the ground like kitchen trash. Immediately afterwards, one could hear the deep sound of something large crumbling.

"What are you doing?" asked a girl's voice.

This blonde-haired, green-eyed girl had one eye covered by an eyepatch and wore a witch's hat and cape. Despite her lovely appearance, she was known as a magic god and held the power to end the history of humanity at any moment. She was a rare life form that sought that lance not because she lacked power but because she had too much.

She was Othinus.

The girl had suddenly appeared behind this killer disguised as Lightning God Thor, but he only shrugged.

“I just thought it was about time.”

A great roar exploded out. One section of Sargasso was filled with a pure white flash of light.

It came from Mjölnir who was connected to Thor.

She had also been helping Marian Slingeneyer with the production of the lance.

“I doubt that will be enough to kill her, but it should be enough to keep her out of action for a bit. Now, Othinus, how high on your list of priorities is the Dvergr?”

“Show your true self. Do you want to die in disguise?”

At some point, the boy became a young man. He was tall yet somehow melancholic. He had the expression of someone who was a bit disappointed with either life or the world.

He too was an existence of whom legends were told in some places.

He was Ollerus.

Originally, he would have been the magic god of the modern age. However, Othinus had usurped the single method and chance.

His role was that of an old god.

He was the ruler of the old laws that was to be defeated in order to prove the new god’s power and legitimacy. Ollerus had been dragged down to that position, but he was still qualified to confront the single person to have reached the territory of a magic god.

The eyepatch-wearing girl narrowed her eye and lightly touched the brim of her witch’s hat with her slender fingers.

“Why are you here? You have risked your life for this plan, so I doubt that was it. If it was, I will kill you right this instant and return to producing the lance. I am a god of magic that can bend the laws of life and death to help me in my fight. Did you think someone’s life or death would be enough to stop my plan?”

“I’m glad you didn’t see through my plan all at once. That puts my mind at ease. It looks like your infinite possibilities sent your power in the negative direction.”

“I can only add humans to the ranks of my Einherjar,” muttered the girl in disappointment. “I have no way of sending a god to join them. I will truly obliterate you. You don’t mind, do you?”

“Ha ha ha. Don’t get so pessimistic, Miss Almighty Magic God. No one can stand on your level at the moment. Don’t treat me like a true monster just because you’re lonely.”

"..."

The girl known as a magic god closed her single eye just once.

It looked like she was trying to take her mind off of some truly hideous clown.

An instant later, the slight space between them was filled with tens of thousands or even hundreds of millions of strange explosions.

If the theory of relativity that summarized the relationship between time and space would allow a black hole-like object to exist under certain special circumstances, the extreme compression of space by their frightening clash may have twisted the continuity of time.

That was how extreme this series of attacks was.

A wall of explosions completely filled the space between those two monsters. It showed no sign of ending and seemed to completely ignore the concept of numbers.

"I thought you had a bit more sense back in Baggage City," said Magic God Othinus while only slightly opening her lips. Despite the noise from all the explosions, her voice sounded oddly clear. "But it seems I was mistaken. Or did you lose your mind at some point? Either way, think about it from the perspective of those who have to deal with you. The world does not revolve around you. Only I may claim that."

"I never thought I could win with this cheap trick," replied Ollerus carefreely. "And it does not matter if I don't win."

Immediately afterwards, Ollerus suddenly ended his side of the eternally even exchange of explosions. The eyepatch-wearing girl's great number of attacks approached with the force of surging waves. Ollerus did not defend or evade. He instead stepped into the deluge of explosions himself.

His bones could be heard shattering and his flesh could be heard bursting.

An arm flew off, but Ollerus's expression did not change even slightly.

Before it could, he rushed up to Magic God Othinus as quickly as possible.

His hand was palely glowing.

"Only someone who has touched the territory of a magic god can research one. And only someone like that can find how to oppose one!!"

He jabbed his palm into the center of the girl's chest.

What looked like a stake made of light shot forcefully out.

“I will turn you into a fairy.”

Time stopped.

The explosions disappeared.

In that silent space, Magic God Othinus’s eye was opened wide. Only Ollerus’s words filled the stillness of Sargasso.

“I built a spell out of a historical fact the great Christian powers carried out without realizing it. Simply put, *they shrank down the pagan gods*. The king of the forest transformed into a dwarf. The queen of the sea was remade into a female monster that sank ships. The god that is hit by this spell will be dragged down from the territory of a magic god and forcibly returned to the territory of a human!!”

One theory said the gods of the many old religions that conflicted with Christianity were reclassified as evil gods who fell under the category of demons. Those became clear enemies, but there were others that had been remade into beings that lived alongside mankind.

In other words, fairies.

These small neighbors were frightening beings that kidnapped people and ate their insides, but they would also help with one’s job or housework if certain conditions were met. The religious powers had once forbidden belief in them, but they had remained in the people’s hearts. These beings had not been completely remade as enemies or completely eliminated. Unlike the evil gods whose great power was recognized but were seen as merciless enemies, most of these had managed to remain unchanged in people’s hearts on the condition that they were made powerless or shrank down.

Ollerus had created a system from this and contained it within a single spell.

The word “fairy” was not all that rare. Religions did not treat it as taboo and it filled children’s fairy tales and picture books. However, very few people had accurately extracted their true form and original role from the flood of information. It was similar to how the great mixture of information on the modern internet diluted the trustworthiness and credibility of the information found there.

And that was why only one who had taken a step into the territory of a magic god could extract the spell to kill a magic god.

It was a twisted method, but it was obvious what would happen if that spell struck Othinus who had reached the territory of a magic god.

“Even if all of mankind worked together, they would have no way of opposing the being known as a magic god. And that simple truth does not change even when one includes those of us who only barely remain within the territory of a human,” said Ollerus.

He spoke of the beginning of a certain death.

“So instead of trying to bring mankind higher, I will drag you down. I will tear off your wings, strike you from the air, and throw you to the throngs of people who can only crawl along the ground. …This is the end. Even if humans cannot kill a god, we can manage against a fairy.”

“Gh…”

The eyepatch-wearing girl twisted her body and a groaning voice escaped her lips.

Was she trying to endure the pain?

Was she trying to suppress the rapid change occurring within her body?

Ollerus assumed that was the case.

“Heh heh.”

But he was wrong.

He was naïve.

Othinus’s shoulders shook and her voice reached his ears along with her sweet breath.

“Thank you, Ollerus.”

“…”

For an instant – just for an instant – even Ollerus’s mind went blank.

She laughed.

He could not even imagine why that girl’s shoulders would be shaking as she suppressed laughter.

That was why it took him a moment to realize it.

Despite having pressed his palm against the center of the magic god’s chest and having fired the stake of light into her, the tip of that stake had not stabbed into Othinus. It was not that a thick wall had appeared to stop it. Ollerus’s senses told him it had long since extended all the way out, but Othinus’s senses said it was only partway out.

“It is a simple thing, Ollerus. A truly simple thing. I deceived your senses. You gave your victorious speech before you had pulled out your secret weapon. That is all. And once you know the trick, sleight of hand has nothing left to surprise you.”

“!!”

“Also…”

Ollerus frantically tried to pull his arm back, but he was too slow.

This had been a one-shot suicide attempt. He had given no thought to a way out.

Magic God Othinus did not hesitate to grab Ollerus’s wrist.

“I can make use of this now that I know it exists. It may have been a waste of time for you, but it is an unexpected reward for me. After all, I finally have a way of finishing things with this damn annoying person from my past! You brought the means of your own defeat!!”

A great noise rang out.

Othinus had slammed her other hand against the young man’s chest. Her hand was palely glowing. A sharp stake of light stuck out from her palm, thoroughly destroyed the interior of Ollerus’s body, and forcefully shot out his back.

“Ha ha ha.”

She pulled back her hand and the stake sticking from it.

The young man’s body staggered.

The eerie and overwhelming presence from before was gone. It had all vanished.

“Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!! Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!!”

The eyepatch-wearing girl’s back arched backwards as she laughed.

It was as if she felt this was much more of an accomplishment than completing the lance.

And…

The young man spoke even as it appeared he would collapse at any moment.

“*My first hope failed, but my second hope is still on track.*”

“…?”

Magic God Othinus’s eyebrows moved in pure confusion.

A moment later, another fairy stake accurately pierced straight through her heart.

“Dah…”

She did not even have time to turn around.

She mercilessly filled the space behind her with explosions that’s numbers reached at least nine digits. Something was crushed and a great roar stabbed through the wrecked ships piled up around them.

She could not breathe properly.

Othinus turned around with the awkward motions of a machine in need of oil. Finally, she saw the second attacker.

“Fiamma…of the Right…!?”

“I performed a valuable experiment back in Academy City.”

The one-armed young man wearing red gave a slight smile while half-buried in the wreckage of ships.

A dark red liquid trailed down from the corner of his mouth.

“I checked to see whether I could completely hide my presence on a battlefield filled with powerful members of various powerful groups. It seems my method was effective even on a magic god. …And thanks to that, I managed to hit you with the fairy spell.”

“I…” Ollerus brought a knee to the ground in intense exhaustion but still spoke with the expression of the victor. “I no longer have any interest in being a magic god. But I could not allow someone to misuse that which I had hoped to be. To stop you and take away your status as a magic god, I do not regret giving up that which makes me special. …You misread that about me, didn’t you? That’s why you thought you had won from the moment you turned me into a fairy.”

“……”

Now that it had come to this, the completion of Gungnir did not matter.

It was not a spiritual item that amplified a magician’s power. It was nothing more than a tool to control a magic god’s great power and make it easier to use. Now that Othinus had lost her power as a magic god, it would not benefit her in any way.

It was all over.

The infinite possibilities had left her grasp.

As those thoughts filled Ollerus’s mind, he saw something he could not believe.

Even a monster like him could not believe it.

“Heh heh heh.”

She laughed.

The eyepatch-wearing girl had not broken.

But that could not be. Ollerus could not believe it. He could see no way it was possible. Othinus had been struck by the fairy spell and thus lost her power as a magic god. Creating the lance no longer had any meaning and Gremlin had lost the symbol behind the organization.

There was nothing that could lead to her victory now.

Or at least, there should not have been.

“Even if I do not win, that’s fine with me,” said the eyepatch-wearing girl in a groan. “What matters is unifying my infinite possibilities. Success and failure were always half and half. No matter how much experience I built up and no matter how great a defeat I suffered, it had no bearing on what would happen next time. I never knew which direction to work in or which way to turn. …I wanted the lance to escape that situation. Instead of having half success and half failure, I would have 100% success.”

“You can’t mean…”

Ollerus finally caught on.

But this truth was truly a nightmare.

“You can’t mean!!”

“*I only needed it to lean in one direction or the other,*” she announced as a grin split across her face. “It did not matter if I completed the lance and gained 100% success or became a fairy and gained 100% failure. My actions were sealed by the constant 50% balance between success and failure. I could never know if my actions had achieved heads or tails, so I could never know if I could build on top of that action. Moving forward with constant heads is one possible path. But if I know every path I choose will come up tails, I can achieve 100% success by *always moving in the opposite direction of the path I choose*!! Failing as a magic god acts as a guidepost towards success as a magic god!! …You two meant nothing from the beginning. Whether I won or lost, you could not stop me from becoming a complete magic god!!”

If she had won, she would have become a complete magic god.

If she had lost, she would have become a complete magic god.

“That’s why that Imagine Breaker was so irritating! In a way, it did hold the possibility of *driving me to 100% failure*, but its role as a reference point and repair point for the world meant it clashed with my desire to change the world. With that method of achieving 100% failure off the table, I had no choice but to invite 100% success with the lance. I never thought you would bring such an interesting alternative approach!!”

She had only needed to obtain one extreme or the other.

“Ha ha ha! Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!! I was afraid of ending up in a twisted situation where I thought I was constantly failing but hit a dead end while walking down the opposite path. Once you reach my level, it is hard to experience such a thorough defeat that it is impossible to recover. That is why I had hoped you would do it for me. I knew you would eventually come to kill me! You really are a genius! Ha ha. A genius at being used by me no matter what you do!!”

By the point Othinus had built up that plan, her battle against the world had essentially been over. No matter what the result, she would accomplish her goal. The lance had not been an irreplaceable piece of her plan. It had been nothing more than one of a few different branches on a chart. And she had managed to hide that fact.

“So let me say it again: thank you,” declared the eyepatch-wearing girl with a smile splitting across her face. “To use your own words, the lance was my first hope and not using it was my second hope. I can’t deny that this is making me feel a bit ill, but the end result is the same. Now, the time has come for me to spread my wings. I will rule over this world in my proper form!!”

No one had done anything wrong.

Her plan had been made so this result would be reached no matter what anyone did.

“…”

“…”

Ollerus and Fiamma of the Right exchanged a quick glance.

And they both took action.

“Success and failure, heads and tails… None of it matters to me anymore,” said the girl with the smile splitting her face. She spread her arms as if welcoming an old friend. “After coming this far, do you really think you have any chance of fighting back? The two of you were only able to crawl through the dirt because you could not leave the territory of fragile children of man. Kneel before me as you witness history. This is 100% success!!”

♦

The rubber military boat approached one end of Sargasso.

Kamijou Touma did not have time to be surprised that such a giant structure had been hidden in the middle of Tokyo Bay or that their base had been so close to Academy City.

He took a step onto that island made up of countless wrecked ships.

A strange sensation rushed up from his foot and stabbed into his brain. He thought he might pass out right then and there.

Something was wrong.

He almost doubted this was part of the real world.

He felt as if he had been plunged into a nightmare horrible enough to kill a human from shock and he could not even tell when the switchover had happened.

Yes.

(This doesn't feel real. Is this Gremlin? Are they able to twist the world this much?)

What had happened with the lance?

What about the magic god?

With those questions in mind, Kamijou saw something fall from the deck of a passenger ship that had broken in half.

It was the man named Ollerus.

Kamijou could not tell if the bloody young man was breathing.

"Hi there," said a girl standing atop the passenger ship.

Kamijou's head slowly turned in that direction. It was as if his head were being forcibly pulled up by an invisible wire.

He could not tell what was happening outside his vision.

Index, Misaka Mikoto, Birdway, Lessar, and the calico cat had been aboard the boat with him, but he could not hear any of them speaking and could not catch even a glimpse of them out of his peripheral vision.

Were they frozen in place like him?

Or, as much as he did not want to think of the possibility, had they disappeared somewhere?

Standing above was a human-shaped singularity that distorted the world more than a black hole.

Magic God Othinus alone smiled.

“It’s already over. You were too late. …But none of that matters now. This was destined to happen whether you were late or early.”

“…I was too late?”

Kamijou’s eyelids twitched oddly.

He could not believe it.

“Are you saying that the lance…that Gungnir was already completed!?”

“Oh, the lance,” said the eyepatch-wearing girl with the look of someone recalling a trivial fact. “Marian Slingeneyer failed. Hawaii, Baggage City, and the attack on Academy City over Fräulein Kreutune all ended in failure. Ollerus destroyed it all.”

“…?”

He could not relax even for an instant.

Despite what she said, Othinus was not concerned or angry.

“*But none of that ever really mattered.*” The eyepatch-wearing girl gave a light shrug. “The lance was nothing more than an item used to complete my position as a magic god. As long as I had a way of doing that without using the lance, it didn’t matter at all. For example, there was the one and only means of killing me that Ollerus secretly developed.”

“…”

“Also, all of Gremlin’s actions may have been working toward the production of the lance, but that was not necessarily the only way of creating it. The method using Dvergr Marian Slingeneyer was just one more decoy. I could have made the lance on my own, but if I revealed that, all of you might very well have interfered. I went out of my way to gather those weaklings and had them carry out that decoy plan alongside my own. It was all so all of you would work to stop that decoy instead.”

“You’re…kidding…”

“About what? That I could so easily overturn the assumption that there was only one method of producing the lance? Or that my subordinates and your comrades could be so easily deceived?” mockingly asked the eyepatch-wearing girl. “Did you know this? The Norse god from whom I took the name Othinus is known as the god of war, magic, art…and also betrayal. He would deceive people to spread chaos and cause unnecessary

disputes all to more efficiently gain the souls of dead warriors. …All of your information about that lance was spread by me. Gremlin and its enemies were manipulated by the information they found where I had conveniently left it for them. No matter what anyone says, that is the truth. Even Ollerus was deceived."

"……"

Kamijou could not keep up with the situation.

His brain refused to comprehend the information.

The great organization known as Gremlin had shaken the world so greatly, but all of that had been pointless effort that held no meaning?

Hawaii, Baggage City, and the fighting over Fräulein Kreutune had been nothing but a safety measure meant to hide the true time limit?

She had done it all alone.

The eyepatch-wearing girl known as a magic god had manipulated the entire world.

"Now, it's time for some fun."

Kamijou heard a sound like a rock landing in some mud.

It came from the head of the blonde-haired, green-eyed girl named Othinus.

The black eyepatch was pushed out from within. An object covered in a dark red liquid shot out from the empty eye socket. It continued on and on.

"Ha ha ha ha!! Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!!"

The magic god laughed arched her back.

An unpleasant noise rang out.

The tip of the lance was not a sharply pointed blade like on a knife. It was a wide blade as if a double-edged sword had been forcibly attached. What would happen if that was forcibly dragged from her narrow eye socket? The sound of a joint popping continued on and on with a sticky sound mixed in. No, that was the sound of *something breaking and splitting*. Her eye socket may have been spreading and distorting like a hole in a rubber band. It may have even grown larger than the girl's small face.

"…Ah…"

Kamijou Touma's body froze as if paralyzed while he watched this overwhelming sight.

He could do nothing but watch.

He could not even guess how much pain that would cause.

He could not imagine what was going on in that girl's head as she continued to smile.

And…

A lance covered in a dark red liquid made its horizontal entrance into the world.

Othinus grabbed the Gungnir she had produced from within her own body and looked down on Kamijou once more.

Her face had returned to normal.

Had it truly possessed the strange elasticity of rubber?

Or had she somehow instantly repaired her smashed and destroyed skull?

"Either 100% success or 100% failure would have completed my status as a magic god."

"Ah…"

"Thanks to all of you, I have gained both solutions at once! Do not think of me as *a mere magic god* any longer. I will now show the world what Othinus truly is!!"

"Ahhhhhhhh!! Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!"

He shouted, screamed, and cried out.

Finally, Kamijou Touma was freed from the bonds keeping him frozen in place.

Without paying any attention to his surroundings, he ran so he could get as close as possible to Magic God Othinus. She stood atop the towering passenger ship, so there was no way the boy's legs could have brought him to her. However, he was afraid his mind would collapse if he did not oppose her in some way.

And…

Magic God Othinus lightly spun the lance around in one hand and pointed its tip toward the heavens.

She spoke slowly.

She uttered two short sentences.

"These small fights are such a pain. I think I'll just end the world."

And exactly as she had announced, everything was immediately destroyed.

AFTERWORD

To those who have bought one volume at a time: welcome back. To those who bought them all at once: welcome.

This is Kamachi Kazuma.

The series with the New Testament label is already on its eighth volume. The fight with Gremlin has continued for that long.

This time, the focus is placed on Kamijou Touma's small objective of saving those he confronts even as he is caught up in a major battle.

At the same time, focus also falls on Ollerus and Othinus.

Someone has to fight back against Othinus somehow, but who can hurt such a terrifying opponent and how? When faced with that question, Ollerus and Fiamma of the Right attacked as a combo that doesn't play fair. All of the foreshadowing laid out in the background of New Testament volumes 5 and 6 was used for this one-shot attack. How did you like it?

Perhaps because of her beauty, Freyja is a popular goddess in Norse mythology, but she is a mysterious existence with many other sides to her. Among those are more aggressive traits such as being Odin's lover and having free control over half of the gods' army of Einherjar. But this time, I used the most basic trait of being a goddess that gives birth to life.

No matter how great a mission a hero has, I hope they do not crush this kind of character underfoot along the way.

I give my thanks to my illustrator Haimura-san and my editors Miki-san, Onodera-san, and Anan-san. The stage this time had to have required a lot of work in a different way from Academy City. I am thankful they continue to stick with the unreasonable things I write.

I also thank all of you readers. I think this is the first time the story has taken place in Tokyo but not in Academy City. I think you will see many different stages from now on as well.

It is time to close the pages for now while praying that the pages of the next book will be opened.

And I lay my pen down for now.

Now, what will happen to the world that was ended without hesitation?

-Kamachi Kazuma